



IN THE CURRENT

WILLIAM
BULLOCK

In the Current

BY
WILLIAM BULLOCK



NEW YORK
WILLIAM RICKEY & COMPANY
1911

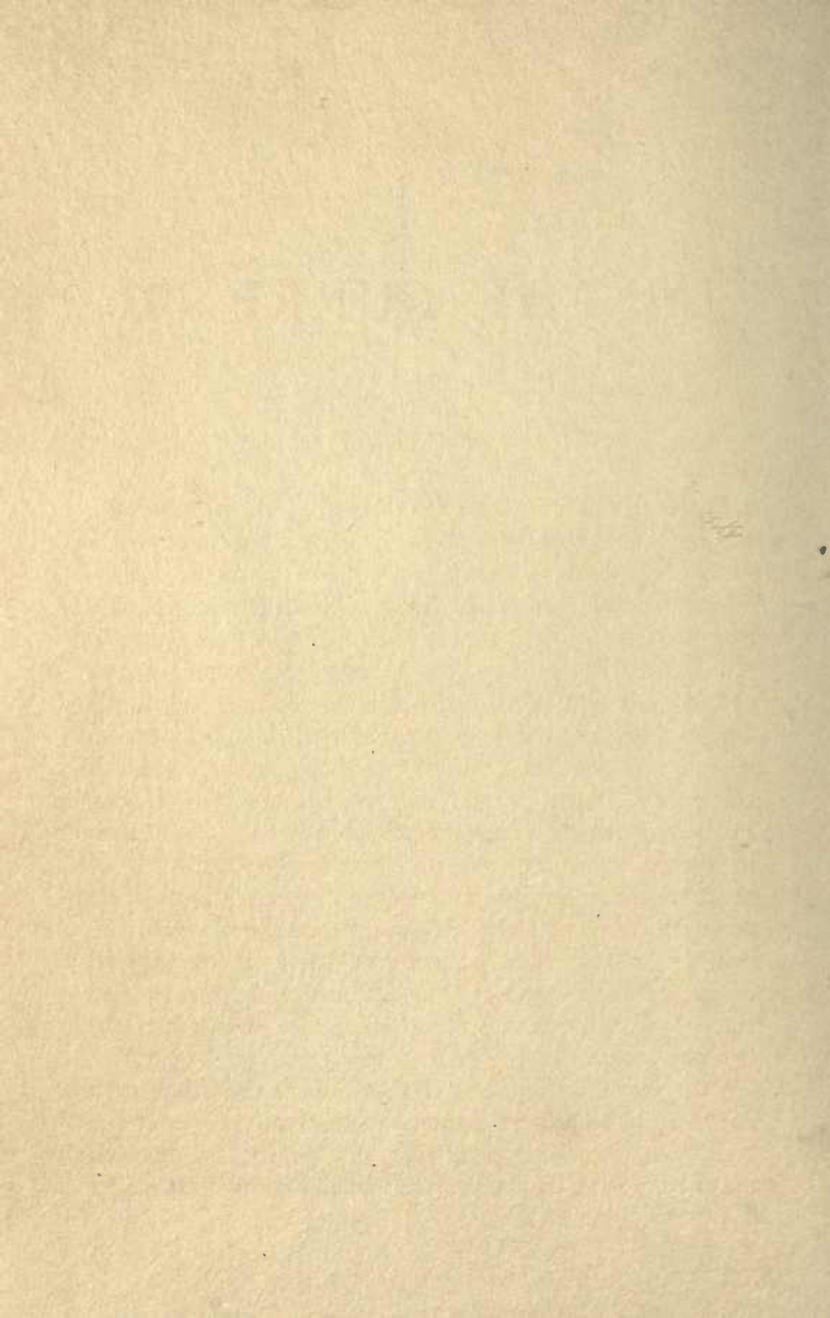
Copyright, 1911, by
WILLIAM RICKEY & COMPANY

Registered at Stationers' Hall, London
(All Rights Reserved)

Printed in the United States of America

IN THE CURRENT

2225550



IN THE CURRENT

CHAPTER I

SOMETIMES I look back upon the days of my rebellion, and as I pass them in review I laugh a little and cry a little. Not that the tears mean sorrow or remorse or repining, or any spiritless thing like that, but simply that my eyes grow red as any woman's eyes grow red when she happens on a long-lost, half-forgotten doll of her childhood. On these occasions it pleases me to imagine I am romantically inclined, as I am sure every woman should be. Still, again, when I cease my laughter and dry my tears the feeling steals over me that I am hopelessly practical. Ah, disillusioning experience! What a world it would be for us heart-trembling women if experience did not rob us of all or nearly all our blessed heritage of sentiment! And yet, contrary creature that I am, I would not—no, not for all the world itself—give up one tittle of all I have learned since I was a reckless, headstrong, know-nothing girl two years ago.

Two years! How long is that? Is it a lifetime or a day? I don't know; I cannot even pretend to answer for myself, and how then shall I answer for you? I suppose the mere period of six years signifies nothing. It might

as well be six years or twelve years or twenty. I remember I used to measure by the years—thirty years, one gray hair; forty years, two gray hairs; fifty, all of three; and sixty—oh, I shuddered at the thought! But never mind; I am not bothered with such dreams to-day—and I am only twenty-one.

Goodness, what a sage person I have become! I wonder if there is another woman in the world so wise or so foolish as I? A riddle of a question; that's how I have found everything. I am such a queer individual that I keep a little globe on the corner of my dressing-table, and every day when I revolve it on its few inches of wire pedestal I say: Riddles, riddles everywhere.

I wonder also, now as I set this down, if you will laugh in derision or scoff at me. Please don't. Although I assure myself I have learned so much, I am still very sensitive. And by reason of my knowledge I do not want to change. I dislike people who lack sensitiveness; more, I have an aversion toward them and shun them. I believe that sensitive women make the best wives. It casts them in such contrast with their husbands, for men to me are so hard and untouchable in the nerves that frequently I cannot forgive them for being—just men. Of course, you will smile at the deftness with which I insinuate compliment to myself; still I don't dread your merriment, because I can share in it. If I have not natural appreciation of humor, a good substitute for it has been pounded into my little head. Experience again! Can we never rid ourselves of the thing? I'm afraid not—but come, I fear I weary you. With my talk of experience, I am hinting at the end of my story, and you very well know that the richest enjoyment waits on the brave reader who resists the temptation to turn the last pages first, to discover in ill-season what happens to the heroine.

Did I say heroine? I didn't mean it, at least, not in my case, for I never could discern anything of a heroic nature in my foolish self. Anyway, I am opposed both to heroes and heroines. I think so much depends upon circumstances that I insist a hero or a heroine always is made by accident. I can sit this minute with my eyes closed and picture myself a heroine had I been born amid different surroundings. That's it. Children are such contrary mortals! An irrepressible little sinner of a baby will choose the most pious of parents, and often and often it is the other way around. Were I in a position to make full confession probably you would be shocked to hear I was an incorrigible from the start, notwithstanding the fact my father wore one of those soft, pancaky black hats so becoming to country rectors. Perhaps, had I known my mother I should have been different—a perfect little lady, in truth. It is a decided disadvantage, I am sure, for a baby, a girl baby particularly, to be left without a mother, because wise as country rectors undoubtedly are they don't know everything. I am so sure of that I make free to emphasize it; yes, emphasize it without one word of qualification. Long ago whenever the mischievous spirit in me asserted itself it was the favorite admonition of my father that mother died when I was three days old, and that I should be very, very good so that I might meet her in heaven. And I remember once I asked: "Papa, do all mothers go to heaven?" and when he answered "Yes," I said: "When I grow up I'll be a mother and that lets me do as I please now, doesn't it, papa?" I always was quaint in argument.

I will not bother you with the details I know of my childhood and early girlhood. They are dull, drab, monotonous details. It is my desire that you share with me the acquaintance of a girl 19 years old; a girl who

imagined herself much older, which is a mistake, I have found, only made by the very young, especially the very young of my own dear sex. I invite you to go on a journey with me, and you accept. Very well, off we go. From North and South, from East and West we transport ourselves to a knoll—a knoll that lacks the size and dignity to be called a hill—on the Long Island coast, where the Atlantic when angry rolls as if threatening to overwhelm the land.

Here we are, then, you and I, and I fancy as you look at me you read the whole story of my old-time loneliness and discontent. It makes me deeply reflective to come here now. But stay—we are not in the present. We are back in a summer afternoon two years ago, one of those fairest of days that always appealed to me as a solace for the fate that held me in that slow, uninteresting country spot. I mark your surprise. You are silent, yet with your eyes you question me how man or woman could languish here in this place with Nature's hand resting free over land and sea. True, and I ask you: What if this were all you knew? What if this half-moon of tree-tops and fields and sand, and this half-moon of water—all encompassed by the horizon of the knoll where we sit, meant the whole world to you? What then? What then, if the spirits of restless forefathers stirred in your breast? What if the little you knew filled you with a longing to break through that horizon line, to stamp your foot on forbidden ground? Ah, I may have been a silly young thing, still—still, as I sit here this moment at my little mahogany desk and meditate on it all, I believe to the contrary.

Did I make a slip and say mahogany desk? I thought we were on a knoll. Of course we are, and now I have a request to make of you. I want you to leave that knoll-top; to retire down the land side a few paces, and conceal

yourself there and peep at the girl sitting above, with her knees caught in her arms and looking far out to sea. One other request: May I crouch beside you behind that patch of wispy scrub? You protest. You say: "Why, you are the girl up there." And I reply: "Oh, no; I'm not. She's only 19, and I am 21." You make room for me, and I crouch beside you. I murmur: "Thanks; I thought you'd understand. Now we'll shadow Frizzie's footsteps until she catches up with me." I crouch still lower, for I have a dread Frizzie may cast reproachful eyes in my direction, and I repeat to myself in secret: *Catches up with me.* What a thought!

CHAPTER II

"FRIZZIE," I asked myself, "why does your father seek to have you marry against your will?"

I was silent at the question. For a few moments I sat tense and motionless, then I threw a defiant laugh to the wind. Marry me off? Marry me off? Wait and see. It takes two to make a wedding!

My mood changed, and I felt very lonely sitting there. The great trouble was I had been left too much to myself; instead of loneliness taking a form of occasional relaxation, it had become a depressing habit. Still, I was not discouraged. I did not grieve hopelessly. Rather, I smiled on the future.

It took no effort for me to be optimistic. Optimism was a large part of my nature. I went to a certain point in depression, then dispelled gloom by laughing at it. So although I was lonely on the knoll that day, I was not an object of commiseration. Pity was wasted on a person of my disposition. Melancholy struck hard at the start, but it was evaporated quickly by my light-heartedness, like the ocean fog before the morning sun.

I blamed myself for delay in asserting my will. My wedding dress was finished; Mrs. Clark was to bring it that afternoon from Covey. In one short week I was to be married. The guests had been bidden; Norman had made the last arrangement for our honeymoon. We were to go to Niagara Falls, to the Thousand Islands, and to a lake in Canada. We were to sail down the St. Lawrence

to Quebec, and from Quebec we were to sail to New York, to spend a whole week there. It was an itinerary promising wonders to a girl such as I. It would be one flight away from my prison. It was a journey glorious to contemplate, and what, then, was the reason of my growing spirit of discontent? I did not know, unless it was I wished to go alone. But that was simply, utterly, impossible. Then perhaps it was because I did not love Norman as much as I had confessed to him.

Love? Love? I turned the word over and over in my mind. What did I know? Only yesterday my father had told me love was the ruling impulse in the hearts of maidens young and happy like to myself. Did father know? That was the question, not for him but for me to answer. A month before I had no doubt. Then I waited in joyous anticipation for Norman's coming; I missed him every hour he was away. Only a month—only four weeks ago—it was my delight to lead Norman to this knoll, and to talk with him about how happy we should be. But I counted up now, and to my surprise found that ten days had passed since I had guided him in this direction, still he had been over to see me every day. Once he had shared this knoll with me; now I jealously reserved it to myself. I was just as I was before father made such a fuss about bringing Norman to the house, as if Norman and I had not played together as children. I was just as I was before Norman's father—that funny old man—and Norman's mother—that middle-aged autocrat—came ostensibly for an afternoon call and stopped to dinner.

I had been blind. I did not at first realize the meaning of it. I did not comprehend that conversation about the friends my mother and Norman's mother had been through their girlhood. It pleased me to credit the story when I first heard it, but I have grown to think better of

my mother. That horrid Mrs. Clark! Did she ever think a girl had a heart of her own? Did she ever think a girl should be consulted about such a trifling thing as her marriage?

It was one evening after father and Mr. Clark and Norman had left the table to smoke on the veranda that Mrs. Clark revealed herself. She began by asking me to pour for her another cup of coffee, although five minutes before she had lectured me against coffee-drinking. She took the last bit of cheese, asked me to pass the crackers, then opened up on me.

"You and Norman should be very happy," she said, with an attempt at a gracious smile.

"Happy, Mrs. Clark!" I exclaimed.

"When you are married, child," she said, continuing as if I had not interrupted her.

"And are we going to be married?" I asked foolishly enough, and unable to check my surprise.

"Why, of course, my dear, Frizzie," she said, trying to soothe me. "Can it be possible Norman has not spoken to you?"

"He has not spoken," I replied with all the reproving emphasis I could command, and just to show I was not deceived I added: "I thought, Mrs. Clark, it was the custom for a young man to speak the first word to the young woman he wishes to be his wife."

She exasperated me by taking time to nibble at the cracker and cheese, but I contained my feelings. Her defense, when it came, was clumsy, just as was everything she did.

"Of course, it is usual for the young man to speak first, Frizzie, my dear, but you understand I thought Norman already had spoken. It was thoughtless and careless of me not to ask him. Please excuse me, Frizzie. I've been

prompted only by a mother's interest in Norman, and, may I say, by my interest in you, my child. You are to be my daughter, you know, or at least I have always wished it—ever since you and Norman have been children. It's your father's wish also, and I never, never should have spoken, Frizzie, had your mother been alive to speak for me. I do so wish you and Norman to marry. There are so many reasons why you should, and they're all so natural. Our families, have been friendly so many, many years—since long before you were born, my child."

She sighed as if in flood of recollection, and settled back heavily in her chair. I was indignant and about to make vigorous reply when Norman entered the room and disarmed me. He looked first at his mother, then at me, and read it all in our faces.

"Mother, you've been talking to Frizzie," he said rather sharply, and by her sudden flush and nervous movement Mrs. Clark betrayed herself. "I thought there was a purpose behind the sudden interest of father and Dr. Peabody in the veranda and their anxiety to have me smoke and talk with them. It's something new for them to care for my conversation. I don't like it, mother; I don't like it," Norman ended, his voice rising in earnest rebuke.

I am afraid we women are frail and wavering, else how could it have taken me so long to discover what really lay in my heart? Mrs. Clark sniffled and whimpered, and muttered a little about undutiful sons; then, with her black silk skirt rustling as it swept the floor, she walked out with an air of injured innocence. I half suspect now it was part of her plot, because it left Norman and me alone with the vital problem uppermost. I said nothing. To be candid, I could not have spoken a word had I wished it. I was tongue-tied, but I was brave, for I put both my elbows firmly on the table and pressed my palms hard

against my cheeks. Some persons might call that a guard against timidity, but I don't. Norman was at the opposite side of the table. He watched me in silence for almost a minute. I could see the marble clock tick on the mantelpiece. Then, still without speaking, he came quickly to my side and caught my right wrist in his hand. I can feel his grip yet. I looked up at him defiantly. I wanted to cry out, yet I did not.

"Frizzie, it doesn't matter what my foolish mother says or does," he said. "You'll marry me, won't you? They've all been talking for the last few weeks, and they think I never thought of it before. Don't believe that. If I hadn't thought of it before they spoke to me, I'd never say to you what I'm saying now. Will you marry me, Frizzie?"

I caught for breath. He stepped back and stood waiting. "Do you really and truly wish to marry me, Norman?" I asked, at length.

"Really and truly, Frizzie," he replied, just like a boy. "I can't live without you."

I laughed lightly at his assertion. It flattered me, yet I felt it was what every girl might expect. "Well, if you wish it so sincerely, Norman," I replied, "I will marry you." I said it without the slightest difficulty. Perhaps, had it come from the very bottom of my heart I should have been less confident.

Norman gave an exclamation of pleasure at my words, and, without the slightest hint of an invitation, snatched me bodily out of my chair and kissed me. I confess I did not seriously object, although I was covered with confusion. He put me back quickly on my feet, and we went out on the veranda. Mrs. Clark was waiting, and, after she had ceased crying on my neck, father gave me a deliberate kiss squarely on the lips, and Mr. Clark kissed

me on the tips of the fingers, bowing the while like a knight of old.

It was a novel experience for me while it lasted, and I cannot say I did not enjoy it. I did, every moment of it. We all sat in the cane-chairs in the growing dusk, and I stole sly glances at Norman every time his face was silhouetted by a lighted match held up to his cigar. Naturally he caught me at it, and I suppose that was the reason his cigar required his attention so often after that.

For more than a month my heart was lighter than a bird on the wing. Then suspicion of myself entered in, and drive it away I could not. A whole night I tossed in unrest, and in the morning arose firm in the resolution I would not marry him.

Why? Sitting there on that knoll I could not explain to the satisfaction of myself. Only that when I looked to the future I saw nothing except going on living, living, living, exactly the same as before. It might even be worse. At first Norman filled every longing in my heart. At first I fancied we sat as one on the knoll, then slowly but steadily it began to creep into my mind we were sitting far apart. A barrier rose between us. I fought against the feeling. I told myself it was not genuine, nor just. When Norman turned his hand up on the ground in invitation I laid my fingers on his. But the touch was not the same. I pinched him on the arm, as if in play, but in reality it was to assure myself he was there—the same Norman as of old. I would laugh at my fears, again I would be possessed by them. That honeymoon! Yes; and suppose we were to extend our travels to go around the world? We should take this cramped corner of Long Island with us, and after all the traveling we should return home to the same cramped corner to settle down for life in it! I could

not marry Norman, and I prayed for strength for the crisis.

I arose and stood silently gazing upon the Atlantic. Never before had I felt so lonely. Oh, if Norman could have stood beside me and shared my feelings! Then all would have been light instead of gray! I welcomed the breeze as it blew over the water and the sand, and cast into folds the soft linen of my dress, and stirred the hair about my temples. Why, I asked myself, was the wind free to blow unrestrained while I was required to curb the thoughts and desires that demanded the whole wide world as a domain for me to live in? There must be instincts of which father and Mrs. Clark and Mr. Clark, and, most of all, Norman, never dreamed at work in my breast. Perhaps that was why I came to that knoll every day, rain or shine, blow or calm.

Sometimes I fancied I fed my nature on the changes of the sea and on the different aspects of the woods, broken by patches of truck-farms behind me. I loved the roar of the tide when it beat upon the shore. I sang in delight when Neptune raised his scepter and sent white chargers on a race toward the spot where I, too, sat on a throne. My heart warmed when the sun splashed gold on the water; it went cold when blackness rode in on the wings of a cloud. Often I pictured myself putting out from land in a seashell for a ship and an ostrich feather for a sail, to skim the seas in quest of a magical realm. For a time this magical realm was for two lovers to share, but now—but now I had found only one of the lovers had the imagination to travel there.

CHAPTER III

THE knoll I called mine was like a sentinel set against the ceaseless toiling of the ocean. Yet I believed the sea made it. I was certain that if my eyes could cut like drills straight down from the crest where I stood they would uncover a great, round boulder at the level of the beach. Further, I was sure, the waves had wrapped the boulder in layers and layers of sand until an observatory was raised for me. But what lay beneath the boulder? Ah, there I was—how little I knew!

When the moon was at the full the tide reached out for my citadel with bold, ambitious arms, but I claimed as a defense a wide ribbon of beach, which received the tide on its breast and threw it back in foaming fury upon itself. I was elated to think all this was wrought through years and ages to wait in readiness for me. I saw myself as a guest of Nature; it was only when I remembered no one shared my sympathy, my delight, that I tasted a little bitterness in the sweet.

Frequently I wished my knoll was bare sand all around. But up its back vegetation was creeping slowly. The path I had worn skirted several clumps of stunted shrubbery. I had marked a dark line through a grass-covered spot. Already I shrank from the inevitable day when the shrubbery and the grass would mount to the top and spread over the face as if bidding defiance to the sea which had made the invasion possible. The recent Spring had sent out tendrils as an advance guard of Time's intent. I had

been tempted to snip these audacious intruders, but I had restrained myself in humble respect for a patient persistence which would mock my petty jealousy in the end.

But in that hour I was constrained to put such thoughts out of mind. There was work to do. So I took to the winding path, firm in the resolution to face my father and tell him of my decision. I felt like running to him. I knew he was in his study, extracting a sermon from a carefully selected text. I quickened my footsteps only to check them and go slower than before. Why hurry? I had hours before me. I went through a neck of woods, passed through a stile to the road, and had interest to observe that dust had been flung on the leaves to right and left by the flight of many automobiles. I reflected that city folk liked the country. I asked myself if they still would like it were they condemned to live and die in it.

I turned a corner and found myself in front of my home. A heavy wooden gate, swinging to both sides from the middle, barred the entrance. I leaned across the gate and surveyed the view before me. The house was severe in the studied plainness of its boards and shingles and its two brick chimneys. It was a house to indicate the humor and habits of its owner. The one relieving feature was the wide veranda, reached by four low steps, and running across the blunt square front of the two stories and attic. The house was forbidding almost in its fresh coat of dull green paint. The general aspect of austerity was accentuated by the drab awnings, now, because the sun was sinking, pulled flat against the upper half of the windows. The well-kept driveway ran straight as an arrow from the gate to the veranda steps, where it reached out to span the house on both sides and to converge in the rear to run to the stable and coach-house hidden far back in the trees.

I could not see these low buildings from where I stood, but I had every detail of their setting clearly in mind.

Nothing ever changed there. It seemed as if the house had stood in its clearing for ages. The lawn, so monotonously exact in its four right angles, was unbroken by a flower-bed. The grass lay uniformly smooth and green from the clipped edges of the driveway to the vine-covered fence, backed close against the wood on three sides and cutting off the road in front. Father was very proud of that lawn, and it was just like him to say it was an oasis that cheered his heart at every homecoming.

Poor father! I could not help repeating that to myself, although I realized it was not proper in the strictest parental sense. I loved my father; I shall have you understand that. He was a good and a great man. There was not another in Suffolk County one-half so popular as he. It was said he was respected, even beloved, by everybody, and I believed it. That he loved me I had not the slightest doubt, and why, then, did I say, *Poor father!* I'll tell you!

It was because when I thought of his love I thought of different kinds of love. It was plain, even to a young, inexperienced girl like myself, that all love cannot be alike.

There was a vast difference between my love and the love of my father. I was so tender and warm toward him; he was so precise and cold toward me! I was convinced father was not equal to a great affection. That was an odd conviction for a girl of nineteen, still I took it for fact without reasoning on it. It impressed me father always was impelled by a strict sense of duty. Oh, always, always that, and never the slightest cause for my taking offense of any kind. Yet his attitude was irritating. I was his daughter, and that seemed to be all-sufficient to him. He thought he loved me as a father should love,

still I was not satisfied with his love. There was something lacking, perhaps something repelling, in it. There were barriers between us, just as there was a barrier between Norman and me. Now and then I went to him and laid my head against his breast, but ever and always there was a mysterious influence that held me from making him my confidant. Only a few days before he had asked me: "Why is it, Frizzie, you never confide in me?" And truthfully I answered: "I don't know, father."

From the gate there I could see him bent over his flat-topped desk in the study on the second floor. His study was across the wide hall from my room. He had the same view of the sea, yet he never stood in the window to look out except when the wind whistled about the house and the waves broke in sullen roars on the beach. Then he only said: "Pity the poor souls who go down to the sea in ships!" Pity them? I envied them.

A rusty hinge creaked sharply as I swung one-half of the gate before me. At the sound, Nipper lifted himself from the veranda, and came wriggling in his rough terrier coat down the driveway to meet me. I laid a hand gently on his head. "Hello, Nipper!" I said, and he wriggled still more briskly. "No, begone!" I commanded, and a sudden look of disappointment showed in his eyes as I walked past him to the house. Timidity was rising within me, and to suppress it I found it necessary to walk quickly and firmly.

Father heard me ascending the stairs. When I reached the top I saw him smiling through the open door. I smiled in return, although my cheeks felt bloodless and cold.

"Come in and sit beside me, Frizzie," he said cheerily, and I crossed the study floor and took a chair close to his desk.

CHAPTER IV

I HAD recited a speech. I thought I had it on the tip of my tongue, but I could not call up a word. I shifted uneasily in my chair, and looked in abstraction at the floor.

"You have something to tell me, Frizzie," said my father. "I can see that."

The mere sound of his voice revived my courage. I raised my eyes to his gravely and laid my left hand on the corner of the desk.

"Do you remember once you told me, father," I said, "that I should learn to think for myself; that I should think and exercise independence?"

"I remember it distinctly," he replied. "And I repeat the injunction. To think and act for oneself is the only safe plan in this world."

I was on the point of pouring out all that was in my heart, but his tone was so quiet and deliberate it gave me alarm. He put his pen on the rack and sat watching me. I let my eyes take in the room.

What an uninviting place it was! Around three sides in oak shelves were books of weighty teaching. Near the door, where father could reach it as he entered, was the book he had recommended as an introduction to all his prized volumes. It's strange how the mind works. I took time at that moment to recall an incident connected with that book. In a defiant mood once I asked father what selection a girl could make from the crowded shelves, and in all seriousness he handed me that book, entitled, "The

Meditations and Vows of Joseph Hall." Ever after I hated, yes, hated, the sight of those shelves.

Why had father denied me the treasures of romantic fiction? Why had he been so short-sighted, so foolish, as to allow me to whet my appetite with stolen sweets? He received a few magazines into the house—sedate magazines they were! He had told me repeatedly the time for novels and such trash, as he called it, was after marriage. But was it? Once he discovered me in tears over the story of a gallant cavalier and a pensive maid, and he caused other tears to fall by a lecture upon the sobriety becoming young womanhood and the benefits to be derived from studious application to his library.

That library! Hundreds and hundreds of books, and not one telling of liquid eyes and golden tresses and serenades. What did father intend me for? The ministry?

I almost laughed outright when I thought of it. I glanced at him and found him observing me closely. I permitted my gaze to wander to the steel engravings, in their plain black frames, of Washington and Lincoln, on the wall where father had only to raise his head from the desk to see them. Near the window, on an ebony pedestal, was an alabaster bust of Luther, a man after father's own heart. What was Luther to me? A thought took hold of me.

"Norman likes this room, father?" I said.

"He likes it better than any room in the house," he replied, with an honest ring of pride.

"I cannot understand why he should," I said, with a slight shudder.

"What is troubling you, Frizzie?" asked father, firmly. I had to struggle to find voice.

"I wished to tell you yesterday, father, but I was not entirely decided, and I lacked the courage."

"But you found the courage to-day. That's a hopeful sign." It impressed me how analytical he was. He nipped his gold glasses off his nose and laid them across the bold title of his sermon. I leaned over and read: "Faith, Hope and Charity—the best of these is Charity." I looked up.

"That's a funny title for a sermon by you," I said impulsively.

"I won't discuss that with you, Frizzie," said father in a voice that chilled me, and at the same time roused me to hostility.

"Then you will discuss Norman," I cried petulantly.

"I thought it was Norman," said father, as if communing with himself, and I felt ashamed for my rudeness. "What is about him now?" he asked, addressing himself directly to me.

I moved forward and placed both hands on his knees.

"I don't wish to marry him, father," I said.

He pushed back his chair, arose hastily, and walked to the opposite side of the desk and stood there white with anger.

"So this is the reason for your serious face these last few days? Do you think this is the time to tell me this—with the wedding one week off? You cannot go back now. You must marry Norman."

I felt an impulse to cry, but I bit my lip to better effect than that. "Have I not the privilege to think or speak?" I asked.

"You have that privilege, as everybody has," replied father, and before he could utter another word I exclaimed:

"Then I demand my right, father."

I knew it was a peremptory challenge not becoming a girl to a parent, yet what was I to do? I was excited. I restrained myself with difficulty, and I believe my earnest-

ness impressed father, for he checked himself when about to reply and waited silently. I clenched my hands in my lap.

"You told me that every girl should be careful whom she married!" I said. "You told me that, because you said marriage was a serious contract, that it was for all time, and that if it did not bring happiness it brought misery."

"I told you that, Frizzie," said father briefly.

"Well then, father," I went on, "I have thought it all over and I have decided in my heart marriage would mean misery for Norman and me." I was unable to say more. Words left me. I was confused, and, to my surprise, all the sternness faded from father's face. He smiled and even laughed. He came beside my chair and pressed my hair with his hand.

"My dear Frizzie, my dear daughter," he said. "You must rid yourself of all such foolish thoughts. Tut, tut, Frizzie! That's no way to repay your father. How can you complain?"

I was moved to heated impulse.

"It's because I'm a girl, I suppose, father, and can't have my own way," I exclaimed.

"Girls! Girls!" said father good-naturedly. "Why, Frizzie, you girls have all the advantages. Boys must go a-hunting, you know. As for the girls—well, they just sit at home and wait for the quarry to come to them. And we, poor fellows, are the quarry, and the girls just take us on the wing! Isn't that so, Frizzie?"

I had never dreamed father could talk so lightly. It was a new revelation of him to me. I was not pleased. His diplomatic hand was too apparent.

"I have not been away from Covey a day, father," I said, "and what quarry, as you say, has come near me?"

The question contained so much truth that father was impressed. I was famished for companionship in that remote, listless country spot. I was without the associations of school, for father had practised economy in instructing me out of the fulness of his secular and religious learning. He had held me aloof from the girls of the farms and the village of Covey. The few girls of my station he favored had gone to schools in the city; they were friends of other days. And why talk of sitting and waiting for *quarry* when Norman was the only youth father had welcomed under his roof?

I looked at father and thought he felt guilty, yet prejudice prevailed. What could an innocent, simple-minded girl know? Why should a daughter of the proper and pious Dr. Peabody entertain a romantic notion?

"Every young woman in Covey envies you," said father. "Were I actuated only by selfish reasons, I should say you have a matrimonial prize in Norman. But I have not been moved by any worldly feeling like that. He is the best husband for you in every particular, Frizzie, and trust in my discernment and experience."

Something like a lump came into my throat, and I arose and with my hands clasped behind my back went to the window. I looked out across the lawn and over the spread of trees to the Atlantic swinging in a silvery crescent. Father did not move from the desk. I knew he was watching me intently and waiting in patience. His patience always nettled me. I thought of that as I lingered in a survey of the scene spreading gloriously before me. I turned away from the window, and walked close to him.

"Does your heart ever beat faster when you look at the ocean, father?" I asked quietly.

"Of course, not," he replied.

"Mine does," I said.

"That's because you are romantic," said my father, "and romance has no place in the life of to-day. It belongs to another and an irresponsible time."

"I don't think so," I asserted, and my voice softened as my thought traveled afar. "The sea fills me with a spirit of freedom—oh, so much freedom! It lies calm and it rolls and tosses—it does just what it wills. I am jealous of the sea and of the wind that blows over it."

"You must grow beyond these fancies, Frizzie," said father, but I detected a little sympathy in his tone.

"If I ever do I'll grow smaller," I replied with conviction. "You never sat on the beach, father, and wondered what lay away off behind the rim of the ocean, where your eyes cannot follow?"

"I am glad to say I have never given rein to my imagination to that illogical extent," said my father.

"Well, I have," I responded in elation. "And I've often turned from the sea and looked at these woods and thought that their dwarfed oaks and starved pines meant just living here—growing up a little, waiting a little, and then dying!"

I saw pain in father's eyes, and disappointment and alarm were in his voice as he exclaimed: "Why, you're not a child!"

"Oh, no, not for ever so many years," I replied in simple earnestness.

"You don't know what you are saying," protested father.

"Do you know any more than I?" I asked innocently.

"I won't answer that," he said. "You must cast aside all these imaginative follies."

"How can I cast them aside?" I asked. "How can I be anything but what I am—myself?"

"You never needed my advice more than you do now," said father.

"Suppose your advice was wrong, father? Suppose I did as you told me and married Norman and was unhappy—what would you do then?"

"You won't be unhappy," he said. "You and Norman will not have a worry. He's independent, and you yourself will have the savings of my lifetime. I have hoarded for you all the pennies that have dribbled into my pocket from this penurious parish. It isn't a proud confession, but you are my daughter. You are everything to me. Do you hear, Frizzie? Norman's parents and I talked of this marriage when you and Norman were playing as children. Your mother would have wished it. You encouraged it until now, and that's the greatest reason."

"I should be happy to please you all," I said. Father took the words for a surrender. He came to me with his hands held out.

"Good, good!" he said. "I knew you would be sensible in the end, Frizzie. I always saw you had a warm spot in your heart for Norman."

"A warm spot in my heart for Norman is only a beginning," I said. "You know my whole heart should be warm—should glow with love for him."

"That's what the sentimentalists say," rebuked father, and in an impatient voice he asked, "What is it you desire, Frizzie?"

"Father!" I cried. "I want a castle with turrets piercing the sky, with soldiers on the battlements in silver armor!"

Father smiled. "You should have lived in the time of the Crusades," was all he said.

"I don't mean a real castle?" I explained.

"What then?" asked father as quietly as before.

"I don't know," I said truthfully. "It's only that I want something—something that's not here in Covey."

Father's face darkened. "I will not have another word of this silly talk," he said sternly. "You had ample time to think. You must realize it's too late to alter your mind. Besides, if you reasoned you would not wish to alter it."

I burst forth in anger. "How was I to think, father? How was I to realize anything when you never told me anything? You watched over me, guarded me on every side, you kept me in a cage, and now you have another cage ready for me! You've made Covey a hated prison to me, and you'd make it my prison always. You told me there was not a cloud in the sky, but there are clouds, father, clouds for you and clouds for me, and your clouds never touch mine and mine never touch yours! You thought you were nourishing my mind, but you starved it. You denied me the truth. But do this: tell me now that Covey here around us is all the world and I'll go out and marry Norman for you to-morrow. I'll marry him this hour if you tell me. But, father, I'll never marry him till I know from you or learn for myself. And you won't tell me, because you can't. You can't father—I know that much. You see nothing in the sea, and Norman told me he saw a lot of fishes! If you were a girl, would you marry a man like that?"

"I will telephone to Norman to come over," said father, without a word for my outburst. I was flushed and nervous, but was thrilled with a sense of triumph at having spoken so bravely; and I did not interfere when father lifted the telephone from his desk. I was quickened to action again by his conversation.

"There's no need to hurry, Norman," I heard him say. "Anytime this evening. . . . Frizzie and I only wish

to speak to you about a little thing. . . . We'll tell you when you come."

I could endure it no longer. I snatched the telephone from father's hands and backed away from him.

"It's not a little thing—it's all—everything!" I poured into the instrument. "You mustn't come." I could hear Norman protesting. I waited an instant. "Why do I say that?" I asked. "I will tell you, Norman: it's because I will never marry you. Never, never, never, Norman!"

I did not give him a chance to reply. I caught the receiver in its hook. I placed the telephone firmly upon the desk and looked straight at father.

"If Norman comes to this house," I said, "I will tell him I will never speak to him, never see him again!"

CHAPTER V

WOULD you believe I spent an hour before the mirror preparing for Norman? I actually did, and, further, I regretted I could not take more time because of dinner. When I went to my room I lifted with a snap a photograph of Norman, and flung it face down upon my dressing-table. Then I dropped into a wicker chair which I had rescued from palpable signs of old age with an elaborate ribbon dressing, and debated whether I should array myself.

I make no apology for my decision. In fact, I feel an apology is not necessary. I did not have a qualm about it. It did not suggest itself to me that father might interpret wrongly. All I did was to follow impulse, or was it instinct? When I tried to reason against it, I found myself without an argument. I reflected I should look my prettiest for a rural vestryman humored as a guest at our table; it was imperative I should extend the same honor to Norman, the more so as he was coming to receive his dismissal.

Screened from sight by the curtains I saw Norman drive up in his buggy. Father went down to meet him, and they clasped hands warmly. Norman caught a rein around the gatepost, and as he walked beside father up the driveway I was moved to break a rose from a vase, filled by Norman's token only that morning, and bury the stem in my hair. I lifted the photograph and glanced at it, and promptly dropped it face down again.

I tiptoed into the hall, and the voices of Norman and

father reached me from the parlor. I started to descend the stairs, and had gone just two steps when a familiar sharp treble shot in through the open window behind me. I hastened back, and, as I expected, saw Mr. and Mrs. Clark in their antiquated open carriage, with the handyman-about-the-house turned coachman for the occasion, and presenting a ridiculous figure in the faded grandeur of a pepper-colored livery which had been handed down more than once in its checkered career.

I returned to my room disturbed and angry. I could manage father and Norman; Mr. Clark did not count. It was otherwise with Mrs. Clark. I still feared her. She was so coolly assertive. She took the leadership as so inalienably her own. I disliked her. I confess frankly, I hated her.

It was not necessary for me to go near the curtains now. I knew what was happening; it had happened so often, and always without variation! The carriage rolled slowly up the driveway. Father and Norman were on the veranda steps. Mr. Clark alighted with groans for his gout. Mrs. Clark sat back grandly and loftily until all three men gathered to assist her out. At last on the veranda, she bestowed smiles on father and Norman, and spared frowns and tart words for the husband she made her slave. There was the same old bustling entrance, the same commotion in the hall, the same retreat of voices as Mrs. Clark moved into the parlor, with the men in her train.

I was ready for tears, but I stamped my foot and forced a laugh. Tears? Not for that domineering woman. Why should I fear her? I was before the looking-glass. I surveyed myself with satisfaction from my white slippers to the rose in my hair. I felt conscious of my power. It was for Mrs. Clark to fear me!

Youth has its advantages. Mrs. Clark was fifty if she was a day. She weighed a full two hundred pounds. She wore her black silks and her poke bonnets of necessity. Try to imagine her in my fluffy white summer dress! I had not stretch of mind enough for that. Ill-temper was the only weapon she had left. I was sure of it. It was her hold on dominion. "The old autocrat!" I half-hissed in my resentment and bitterness. "I'll clip her claws!"

Why had she intruded at such a time? It was a secret with herself. Mrs. Clark was not a confiding nature. She was exactly the reverse. Perhaps she had seen Norman turn from the telephone surprised and dejected, and suspected trouble. It was a theory in keeping with her suspicious disposition—still I was glad she had come.

I had brought about a new situation. I remembered a phrase in father's conservative newspaper. I was playing a "leading rôle." I liked that phrase, aye, I loved it. I was of importance for the first time in my life. I had asserted myself. I was doing my own thinking; I would act for myself!

I was elated. I danced about the room. I clapped my hands in rejoicing. I stood Norman's photograph up. What did I care? I could look at it without a quiver. Mrs. Clark? Oh, ho! Out of the room and down the stairs I went, running and wishing for wings to carry me faster. I burst into the parlor. I ran with speed unchecked to the mahogany table, stopped there abruptly, and cried out:

"You are all here—you father and Norman and Mr. Clark and Mrs. Clark—and you all must know: I won't marry Norman."

Mrs. Clark did not disappoint me. She provided the sensation I wished. She was pressed into an armchair. She caught for breath. Her red cheeks blazed and seemed

about to burst. She tried to rise, but could not gather strength. She sank back in the chair, and feebly gasped, "My son!"

"That's it exactly, Mrs. Clark," I said, stepping aggressively toward her. "It's all your son. It's all your son and all yourself, without a generous thought for me. You'll have to find somebody else for Norman to marry."

She rose at me in fury. "You ungrateful, spiteful, mean little pussy cat!" she stormed. "I could whip you. *You* won't marry Norman? I'm glad you won't. He's well rid of you. A fine, obedient wife you'd make!"

I laughed boldly at her. "That's it again, Mrs. Clark," I said, "an obedient wife!"

"You won't marry Norman with every preparation made?" she cried as if suddenly realizing the full import of my ultimatum. "With flowers ordered for the house and for the church, and with your trousseau ready? You'd make us all the laughing stock of Suffolk County! You'd have my son and me written up in the papers! You'd disgrace us just for the sake of your mean, nasty temper! It's easy to see you've been without a mother's hand over you."

"Yes, Mrs. Clark," I said in quiet sarcasm, "and you as a mother never asked me if I happened to love your son."

"Why should I ask you or any girl?" she retorted. "Who wouldn't love my son? And, besides, there's altogether too much nonsense about love in these days. I didn't marry Mr. Clark for love, and look how happy we've been. You can't dress and eat and have your servants and your horses on love. It's all very consoling to people who haven't a dollar to marry for love, but families in our position must be business-like."

Father came between us. "Now, now, please, no more of this," he said in a placating tone.

"I won't listen, Charles," said Mrs. Clark. "Your daughter is undutiful."

"You must listen, Mrs. Clark," said father firmly. "Now, both of you sit down."

Mrs. Clark seemed inclined to protest further, but she cowed before the stern look of father and settled herself in the armchair. I was at a loss what to do, and I felt a dread of the situation slipping away from me. Father put a hand on my shoulder, and I sank to a seat. As usual, father was very deliberate, and walked slowly around the table to a chair, from which he took an open newspaper and folded it before sitting down. I half turned my head and saw Norman on the piano-stool. He was very pale and he looked at me without the slightest sign of recognition. I glanced around for Mr. Clark and found him in a corner squirming in apprehension in a Morris chair. Father drew himself up, and his face was as grave as when he prepared himself to deliver a sermon.

"It is plain to me there is only one thing to do at present," he said, "and that is, to take time to search our hearts before arriving at a decision. It is seldom we do not regret action taken on impulse. Perhaps we have not given enough thought to my daughter. Perhaps her pride has been hurt by us taking so much for granted; perhaps when she has had time for reflection she will come to the conclusion we so earnestly desire."

"I have decided for all time," I said.

"I wish for nothing but your happiness, Frizzie," said father. "That is my prayer. I believe you would find happiness as Norman's wife. I would not ask you to do anything against your will, but I do ask you to reason a little."

"Girls never reason," snapped Mrs. Clark, tossing her handkerchief angrily in her lap.

"Maria? Maria?" ventured Mr. Clark in gentle reproof.

"Sir!" returned Mrs. Clark, and the little man subsided instantly.

"I cannot see why this slight trouble should not be smoothed out to the satisfaction of everybody," continued father in the same even voice. "I propose this: let Frizzie have until to-morrow. Then she and I will drive over to The Beeches."

"To talk as we are talking now, father?" I asked.

"More amicably I hope, Frizzie," replied father, trying further to calm me with a smile.

Norman came to the table and I was glad. He had disappointed me. I had looked for him to show emotion. Deep down in my heart there may have been a longing for him to throw himself at my feet. That would have been flattering to me, but, of course, it would have meant the loss of his last chance.

"Now we'll hear what my son's got to say," said Mrs. Clark. Norman looked straight at her.

"Mother, it is not for you to decide," he said, and the woman gasped. "It is not for Dr. Peabody to decide. It is not for father nor for me to think for Frizzie, or to tell her what to do. Frizzie must and shall decide for herself."

The blood rushed to my cheeks. I felt like screaming, or swooning. It was a manly speech, and I had not expected it. The room seemed to be in a whirl before my eyes. It was Norman, after all, who was master. The humiliation was mine. Faintly I heard Mr. Clark say, "I admire you, my boy." More distinctly I heard Mrs. Clark storming at the devoted old man for that honest bravery on his part. I saw father arise and stand across the table from the chair where I sat. His face was colorless and drawn. Where was I? What was I doing? What had I said? What had Norman said? Yes, yes! He had said

it was all for me to decide. He also wished to withdraw. He also was without love. Like his mother, he had been engaged in a game of deceit. I was unable to control myself. I sprang to my feet, and faced him in wrath.

"And you would have married me and when it would have been too late you would have let it be known that you never have loved me?" I cried.

"You are wrong, Frizzie," he said.

"You were like your mother," I went on. "You were ready to sacrifice me. You were ready to marry me to please your mother and my father, and not to please yourself."

"Stop!" commanded father.

"I won't stop," I exclaimed, turning to him. "I'm filled with loathing for the whole business. That's what Mrs. Clark called it—business!" I stamped my foot. "I hate you all. I despise you all," I called, and could say no more. I hung my head. I was becoming ashamed. I know I had gone too far. One kind word from father or Norman, or even from Mrs. Clark, and I should have spoken a full apology. But the word did not come. There was only silence—silence that oppressed me, that crushed the penitence rising in my breast. I could not understand why Mrs. Clark held her tongue. I grew confused in conflicting feelings, and stood still.

Presently I became conscious of Mr. Clark rising from the chair in the corner. The dear old man! There was kindness in him, and courage when the occasion demanded. For once he closed his ears to his wife's austere, "Benjamin!" I felt him close behind me, and I turned. Would you believe it, there were tears in his eyes. Truly, there were; and in the tenderest manner possible he touched my arm, and said:

"If I had a daughter, Frizzie, I should wish her to be just like you."

Before I could reply, Mrs. Clark was on her feet.

"How dare you say that! Your daughter, indeed!"

But Mr. Clark was not done. There was a protest of righteous indignation left in him.

"Hang it all, I said it, Maria," he burst out, "and I'll repeat it if you dare me."

With a show of vanity that might easily be excused in so estimable a man, Mr. Clark stuck his hands under his coat-tails, marched back to his corner, and was seated before his wife recovered from her astonishment. But almost immediately he began to sink in his chair, as if from fear of the results of his temerity. However, Mr. Clark could count on my sympathy and support. He was a rebel like myself.

"This dreadful affair is becoming worse and worse," moaned Mrs. Clark. "It will be the death of me." She lifted a corner of her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Now, mother, there must be no hysteria," said Norman, and she dropped the handkerchief quickly.

"You're against me too," she wailed. "My son! My own flesh and blood!"

"You know I am not against you," replied Norman.

"Well, maybe we ought to do what Dr. Peabody advises. I feel the need of fresh air. If Frizzie will only promise she'll come over to-morrow—well, I'll say nothing more to-night." She sighed heavily. "Might I ask you for my sake to drive over, Frizzie. It will not do any harm, and it may do a lot of good."

"I cannot refuse you when you put it like that, Mrs. Clark," I said, collected once more.

"It's very good of you, child," she responded. "Oh, dear, dear, after all my plans!" She moved across the

room. "Come, Benjamin, come. And you, Norman, come. Take my arm. We shall go." Norman stepped to her side. She held out her hand to father.

"Good-by, Charles. I know this is not your doing."

Father was very cordial. "Don't worry, Mrs. Clark," he said as he grasped her hand. "I am sure it will all turn out for the best."

"I cannot leave the house without parting from you, Frizzie," she said. "Come to me and take my hand, so that we may show there is no ill-will."

I went over, but instead of taking her hand I presented my right cheek and held myself so rigid she had to stand on tiptoes to kiss it. She did not suspect my trick, and Norman passed out with her without a word to me. Mr. Clark lingered in a grasp of my hand. Finally, with even more than his usual graciousness, he touched his lips to my finger-tips. "God bless you, Frizzie," he said, and followed Mrs. Clark out. How was it, I thought, such a man should have such a wife? Father also went to the veranda. There was a wait for the carriage, and Norman returned. I was nervous and afraid.

"Don't prolong it, please, Norman," I requested.

"I won't, Frizzie," he said. "Will you come to-morrow?"

"Certainly," I replied.

"You didn't mean it when you told mother?"

"I did mean it, but it might all have been ended here."

"Do you think that in your heart and soul?" he asked.

"Yes, I do Norman," I replied.

"Then you mustn't come, Frizzie. When you feel that way, you are right about it, and you needn't be uneasy about the flowers for the church or the house or the invitations. And don't think of mother or me. It will all be forgotten in a few days."

I was opposed to him, yet I could not resist saying, "I'll come, Norman." His face became almost radiant. "You mean it, then?" he asked, and I repented. I was against yielding. "I may come, and I may not," I said.

"I believe you love me, or you would not be so contradictory, Frizzie," was his surprising assertion, and he left me a prey to dejection.

From the window I watched the carriage drive off, and saw Norman in the buggy wave his hand to father. I still was gazing out, half in abstraction, when I heard father's step in the room.

"You have made a nice mess of things, Frizzie," he said.

"Do you think so, father?" I demanded.

"Yes; I'm afraid you have," he said coldly, and I was all bitterness and anger again. I fairly raced to the door, and stopped there a moment.

"I'm glad I've made a mess of it," I cried out. "I'm glad I made a mess of it before you and Mrs. Clark had time to spoil my whole life."

Before father had time to call I was across the hall. "Frizzie!" came after me a second time, but I did not halt. I gathered speed up the stairs, ran into my room and banged the door behind me. I snatched Norman's photograph off the dressing-table, tore it in two, threw wide my arms and let the pieces fly. "That for him!" I said, and dropped in exultation into my wicker chair.

I become quiet and thoughtful. I recalled Norman in the parlor. He was manly and handsome. Yes, he was handsome! I recalled Mrs. Clark. Oh, Mrs. Clark! My mood changed again, and I leaned far back in my chair and laughed.

Heavens, what a contrary creature I was!

CHAPTER VI

HAD any one asked me why I went to Clark's the next day I could not, try as I might, have made honest answer. Neither could I explain why my father wished me to go there. He had said he would not strive against my will, and father never said anything he did not mean. But who could know father? Were he not so wholly onesided it would be comparatively easy to comprehend him.

Not infrequently in those days I drifted into musing on him, and always it ended in my feeling nettled at myself. It seemed so useless to approach father from my viewpoint. It was like trying to draw the poles together. Yet just as there must be some sympathy between the poles, there was a degree of sympathy between father and me. But our sympathies were remote and at cross-purposes. It took me a long time to discover—but I did discover it—that father and I were as one in tenacity and downright obstinacy. I came to think, too, it was knowledge of my kinship to him in this respect that led father to oppose me with such determination. Had I been a boy, probably he would have acted otherwise, for the plain truth was, father believed the male sex should have a monopoly of will-power. He was an old-fashioned man, whose idea of happiness, I was sure, was a wistful-eyed, pensive, dependent wife—the type of woman so aptly described as “clinging vine.” I was not that kind. I was an unconscious champion of Women's Rights; I was for equality. I was for absolute independence, and father did

not see that I was what my circumstances were, and a reflection of himself.

Had I been a sighing little body father would have bent me as he would a straw, but all the spirit of revolt was quickened in me by his assumption of arbitrary authority. I was to blame, of course, for my rebellion, but father was to blame and Mrs. Clark was to blame and also Norman. They had made me know, for one thing, that I had a temper; they taught me to know I had the courage of that same temper.

Fear was not absent from my heart, but I would not turn back. I would go to Clark's despite the hesitancy and reluctance within me. Father greeted me at breakfast with more than usual cordiality. I expected argument, but he did not broach the momentous question. He pushed back his chair and interested himself in his newspaper. I rang for more coffee, and was so deep in musing that Mother Ann had come to my side before I became aware of her presence.

I called her Mother Ann because it pleased her no less than it pleased myself. What a good old soul she was! I was sure I should have loved her dearly and unreservedly had I not given way a little to the prejudice of the world toward those who wait on it. Often I had felt like bestowing my confidence on Mother Ann. But I refrained, because I was something of a hypocrite, just as you are, no doubt. Understand me. I have told I was a striver for equality, but not for equality in every direction, and that is why we women cannot in a day gain common footing with men. We are on an equality with men in our hypocrisy; our demands do not cover all social grades. Of course, we assert they do, but as a matter of fact they cover no more than the particular grade of society to which we women as individuals belong. That's

the great drawback to the world as I have found it. There is never a full forgetfulness of self; there is never a complete merging of all interests, of your interest and of mine.

But I was dejected that morning, and the feeling tended to draw Mother Ann and me together. We were drawn together in spite of the reserve felt by me, and, I must add, in spite of the reserve felt by the white-haired servant. Mother Ann was proud, too. I have found that pride belongs as much to one class as to another, and I regret it usually happens that pride manifests itself in less objectional form in workers than in their masters.

There must have been a pleading loneliness in my eyes when I raised them to Mother Ann, for without a moment's hesitation she pressed my shoulder softly with her hand. And I was not in the least ruffled or indignant or irritated; instead, a sense of comfort stole over me, and it was with heartfelt satisfaction I permitted her fingers to pass in a caress across my brow. Father got up from behind his paper and passed out to the veranda.

"I know what they're wanting you to do, Miss Frizzie," she said, "and I'm telling you to do what pleases yourself and nothing more."

"You do, Mother Ann?" I questioned eagerly.

"That's just what I do, Miss Frizzie," she replied. "I couldn't hang around here without picking up things. I know all, but I didn't have to hear them talking last night, with me in the kitchen and the door open. I could see it all in your face, Miss Frizzie. Many's the girl I've seen the same way, and a sorry bride makes a sorry wife. I'll tell you something, if you want to hear an old woman's clack."

"Sit down and tell me, Mother Ann," I said promptly. She seated herself in father's chair, with a tray laid across her knees.

"It's just this: I don't like Mrs. Clark half as much as

you do. She's wicked as she can be. Not wicked so she'd poison anybody, but wicked with her tongue. Your own mother never liked her a cent's worth, Miss Frizzie."

"I knew that; I knew that," I exclaimed in joy.

"Of course, you did, because there's a lot of your mother in you, Miss Frizzie. Mrs. Clark always was a pest around here, and your mother only stood her because she couldn't get rid of her. Women like Mrs. Clark stick and burn like mustard plasters, but if I was you, Miss Frizzie, I'd drive her out of my sight with a broom."

"But why do they want me to marry Norman? Why did they ever plan it? Why are they so determined, Mother Ann?"

"If I could tell you that, Miss Frizzie, I'd be able to tell you how many husbands you'll have and when both of us will die. Things like this just happen. They drifted into it, and now they can't drift back; and they're afraid to stiffen themselves and burst back in spite of everything. They're cowards; they're frightened for what people would say. And they've been thinking on it so long they're sure there's nothing better for the both of you. That's the most I can make out of it, and it's more than they can make out of it themselves. But you'll be thinking I'm making bold in talking to you like this, Miss Frizzie?"

"No, no, Mother Ann, I wish you to talk," I said. "Go on."

"I couldn't just keep my mouth shut any longer," she said. "I watched you grow up. I took you out of your mother's arms a minute before she died. I was in the house here when you were brought home from the christening in the church. I looked at the hair rioting over your head, just at it's rioting now. I took you in my arms, and I said: 'Dr. Peabody, you may christen her

Helen and all the rest of the fancy names, but she's always going to be Frizzie to me.' That's the gospel truth, Miss Frizzie; and from me calling it one and another took it up until here you are this minute most forgetting your real name."

I am happy to say I went straight to her and kissed her.

"If you were I would you marry him, Mother Ann?" I asked, as I drew back.

She looked at me with a suspicion of a smile. "If I were you I'd do what my heart bid me, and the world might burn up before I'd do different. It's you that's doing the marrying, and Mrs. Clark didn't do any great shakes when she married, herself. Indeed, she didn't. She married a man that had to be bossed, or he'd be no man at all. She's been a good boss, I'll say that much for her, but I'll say not a word besides." Mother Ann heaved a long sigh. "I was married myself once," she went on, after a pause, "and between you and me, Miss Frizzie, it looks as if Mrs. Clark got the best of it. She's had her husband anyway, but as for myself I don't know these twenty-two years back whether I'm a married woman or a widow. I took my mother's advice; if I had to do it over again I'd take my own. Your father married us, and a right, smart set-up pair we were. I thought my heart was in the right place; maybe he thought the same. But if he did he didn't think it long after the wedding, for at the end of the first six months he went away and from that day to this he's never come back."

"I'm very sorry, Mother Ann," I said.

"You needn't feel sorry, Miss Frizzie," she replied. "I lost no sleep over him. Any woman is a fool to cry her eyes out over a man that doesn't think enough of her to keep from running away—and I wasn't a cross wife, either. The only thing that worries me now is the fear

he'll come back, for the likes of him never dies. What would I do with him? I'm better pleased working in this house than working to keep the roof over the head of a husband. I made my mistake in marrying him in the first place, and watch out and don't make the same mistake yourself, Miss Frizzie. When you meet the man that's born for you, you'll know him without knowing it. I hardly know what I mean by that myself, but maybe you'll catch it."

"I catch it, Mother Ann," I said, "and thank you very, very much."

"Then don't let go of it, Miss Frizzie," she said cheerily, and, arising, bustled out with the tray in one hand at her side and in the other hand holding out the coffee-pot aggressively, as if it were a weapon with which to chastise her truant spouse.

I thought on what she had told me. *When you meet the man that's born for you, you'll know him without knowing it.* Wise Mother Ann! We find the truth where we least expect it. The truth is in us, and sometimes the Mother Anns point it out for us. Sometimes we learn to see it, then we ourselves are Mother Anns. Did I *know without knowing* when Norman first came courting? There was a puzzle. I could not decide. Norman was big and handsome, and kindly and brave, but was there not more to be wished?

I went up to my room and threw up the window and gazed out upon my old friend the sea. And I did not discern Norman out there. Neither was he anywhere in the woods nor in the fields, as father and I passed through them on the drive over the three miles of winding, dusty road to The Beeches. Neither was it the Norman I was looking for who came running out of the musky old house to assist me out of the creaking surrey.

CHAPTER VII

It hardly seems necessary to tell you from what The Beeches took its name. The hoary, magnificent wood surrounding the house and barns afforded the suggestion. The name came without any exercising of the imagination. The Beeches meant a merging of things, and at the time of which I write the process was apparent in more than the mere externals.

The home of the Clarks had stood long enough to become familiar with the beeches that wound it round. The house and trees together seemed to be part and parcel of the sloping hill on which they sat. The house, the trees, the hill, separately and collectively, smacked of antiquity. The place in a way reminded me of father's lawn. It was like a verdant oasis set in the heart of the great expanse of stunted oak and pine and the cultivation taking grip with an effort in the sandy soil.

It was an ancestor of Mr. Clark who had found this fertile spot, planted it, and handed down the house as an example of the Colonial period. I had delighted as a child to visit the old place with father and to romp with Norman in the deep shadows of the trees. Now all that was changed. In the newness and buoyancy of nineteen summers there was no room for veneration. When the horse turned in from the road and began to climb the hill a feeling of depression weighed on me. I remember the thought crossed my mind it was as if I were driving into something akin to a tomb.

It was such a substantial, eternal place! It breathed so strongly of a life going on and on without ever shaking off its monotony and sluggishness! It seemed so unchanging, so fixed in conservatism; the oak walls of the house seemed to defy time itself.

The low, round stones marking the sides of the driveway were mossgrown. The trees were gathering moss, and their tops met in a funereal arch overhead. Permeating all was an atmosphere of other days and other people, and I was not young enough nor yet old enough to grow in appreciation.

And the Clarks went on and on like their home—the footprints of one generation followed by the next, and the highest ambition of each successive head of the family being to fill the office of district attorney of Suffolk County. Benjamin Clark lived up to tradition, and kept from dying of indolence by occasionally prosecuting a neighbor for assault and battery, drunkenness, or the raiding of a chicken coop. Norman Clark seemed likely to realize the hope of his parents by one day rising to district attorney; perhaps, he would prove better than his fore-runners and be rewarded with a seat on the bench. I knew that had been one of the dreams of the Clarks through several generations, but it still waited for realization. The family was rooted in itself; it needed a good shaking up. It was like my own family; it was like all the old, sedate families scattered about the county, all boasting of long lines of ancestry, all only a few steps removed from the Revolution.

Other families, whose only boast was great wealth, had carried out an invasion within recent years. They had settled themselves in what they called a "colony," with their summer homes on green ridges won from yellow sand dunes. These families played their golf and their

tennis, drove their automobiles and their horses, sailed their yachts and engaged in their other forms of amusements without once trespassing on the self-contented privacy of the Clarks, the Peabodys, and all the rest of the old families rooted in the soil. The Clarks and the Peabodys and their allies near and far were exceedingly, even excessively, serious.

I could picture myself a bride coming up that driveway. I should be like half-a-dozen, perhaps a dozen, brides before me. I should look suspiciously into the gloom of the trees; it would not surprise me to see the brides of other times look at me with grave faces from behind the hoary trunks. The sound of distant laughter would be in my ears. A line of embarrassed bridegrooms would wait, each in turn to give me a quick embrace and a shy kiss. And for that there would be hand-clapping, and the laughing approval of the throng of guests, gathered in the great, square dining-room, with oak panels on the walls and massive oak beams across the ceiling.

It all was very clear to me. The marriage of the son and heir was a red-letter day in the Clark family. It had been a day of days always; it would be a day of days when I came there a bride. A bride! Yes, and when the day was done, and the guests had departed, I should take up living where other brides had left off. I should prowling around and explore the dim roominess of my new home. I should fit the big iron keys to the big old-fashioned iron locks. I should examine the heavy iron door handles. I should watch the sun filtering through the heavy window shutters. I should inspect the aged mahogany furniture; the long line of Clarks in faded gold frames would pass under my scrutiny, and then take up the sameness of the life of all the brides who had preceded me.

These thoughts and many more of a similar nature possessed me when I accepted Norman's extended hand, and laid the slightest possible weight upon him in stepping down from the sully to the sandstone flag, which was scoured almost painfully clean, and lay the full width of the doorway. I thought Norman suspected my state of mind, for he withdrew his hand rather hastily and seemed to take undue interest in a conversation about the weather with father. We went slowly into the roomy hall, and presently Mrs. Clark came rustling down the stairs, with her husband carefully picking his steps behind her.

I must say, Mrs. Clark, appeared cordial. Whatever she felt in her heart outwardly she was the soul of good-nature—for her. I even detected a degree of fervor in the smack with which she saluted me. I was flattered when she stood off and looked me up and down and said: "How pretty you look, Frizzie." Her tactlessness came out when she added: "You put me in remembrance of the time when I was a girl." Gracious, if the day ever came when I should look like Mrs. Clark in the present or in the past!

I shall not tax you with the details of that second conference. It was a conflict much like the first. Father was on his dignity again; Mrs. Clark tried to be dignified and couldn't. Mr. Clark was fidgety and nervous. He had a difficult position, trying on the one hand to make clear his sympathy for me, and on the other seeking to avoid the wrath of his wife. Norman was pale of cheek, reserved, unresponsive, and unsatisfying in his protests that the wedding must wait upon my consent. As for myself I was quick in temper and obstinate, a prey to a score of doubts; one moment admiring Norman, the next cold and resentful toward him. I would think our ways perhaps ran together, and again I would think our happiness de-

pended upon our traveling apart. Not for a moment did I lose my measure of sullen enmity for Mrs. Clark. I opposed my father at every turn, and entertained the secret wish that the problem could be left to the tender disposition of Mr. Clark.

There was one exciting scene, however, which I cannot pass over. This because it led to my discomfiture, and showed what troubles may follow a thoughtless speech. I am afraid my temper has been one of my greatest handicaps; I know to a certainty it has ruled my tongue and my actions many, many times too often. Of course, the talk and general attitude of Mrs. Clark would tax the patience of a saint, yet that was no reason why I should have expended my wrath upon Norman.

Mrs. Clark had been babbling away at a great rate when I lost control of myself. I ran to Norman and flaring in anger demanded why he wished the engagement broken when his every indication was for the wedding to go on? Norman's cheeks grew still paler at the question, then a tinge of red showed in them. His eyes seemed to pierce me, and I quailed as I realized sincerity was gripping every fibre in him.

"Can't you read the truth, Frizzie; can't you guess it even?" he asked, his voice rich in pleading. "Don't you know the only reason I don't assert myself and take it out of the hands of mother and Dr. Peabody is because I love you?"

"What!" I cried. "You mean to tell me that now?"

Every speck of red went from his face, which was very pale again. He did not heed my call, but turned on father and Mrs. Clark.

"You've wrung it from me at last," he said, in a voice sharp with reproach, "and you may draw what satisfaction you can from it."

"I've wrung nothing from you, Norman," put in Mr. Clark.

"I've got to thank you for that, father," said Norman. "Mother and Dr. Peabody wrung it from me, that's what I've got to say." He paused, and Mrs. Clark had not the heart to speak. Father only bowed his head, as if in silent confession to the accusation. I wished I were a thousand miles away. This was more than I had bargained for. But escape was impossible, and Norman turned to me again.

"I don't blame you, Frizzie," he said. "It's only that your father and my mother thought they knew more than either of us. They led me into this just as they led you. They thought they put the idea of our marrying in my head when it was there already. I wished to have my own way about it, but they wouldn't let me. They thought we were so young we both needed guardians. Had I been left to myself and had you favored me, then that would have been splendid. Had you refused me, then that would have been all right, too. I should have gotten over it, but they wouldn't listen to me. They knew better; they knew what was in your heart and what was in mine. They drove me. They tried to drive you. But you were the stronger, and their well-laid plan failed. You were stronger than I, and I'm glad one of us had the courage to fight. You're right, Frizzie. We can't and we won't be married as a matter of business."

"Norman, Norman," wailed Mrs. Clark, "you mustn't be so hard on me. I did everything for the best."

"That's just it, mother," replied Norman, "everything's done for the best. And if it turned out for the worst you wouldn't be the one to suffer for it. Why, you wouldn't even give me time to propose for myself. You anticipated that—you remember that evening, Frizzie, when I entered

the parlor and mother was talking to you? I was never even asked about the date for the wedding. All I heard was that bridegrooms were of no account at weddings, and that our wedding was to be just the same as the wedding of father and mother, which was like the wedding of grandfather and grandmother, and so on back through a hundred years or more. I ought to have asserted myself, but how could I? My hands were tied. But, thank God, the truth is out at last. We'll part this minute, Frizzie. You'll go your way, and I'll go mine, and we'll forget all about this. And I'll say just one word more, and then have done forever: I loved you, Frizzie; I loved you years ago, and I still love you. That's the whole truth, and whatever happens time will not change it."

His voice rang triumphant, and I stood helpless in a rush of emotion. I saw, however, the blood mount in a crimson flood to the roots of Mrs. Clark's straight black and gray hair.

"I won't recall the invitations at this hour!" she almost shrieked. "I won't try to explain what never can be explained."

"It's settled, mother," said Norman, "and the invitations will be recalled."

For a few seconds Mrs. Clark wavered on her feet. Then her body seemed to lose all power of resistance. She sent out several little cries of despair and grief. Finally the well-meaning but misguided woman flopped back heavily into her chair and burst into a torrent of tears. It was the sight of Mrs. Clark weeping disconsolately that kept me from breaking down. I could never afford to make myself as ugly as that. I controlled myself with a great effort, and just checked myself short of throwing my arms around Norman's neck.

It would be idle to attempt to deny he had made a profound impression upon me. The truth was, he had never looked so big and manly in my eyes as he did then. Why, he had taken on inches! And I was still fighting against my impulse; still actually close to surrender, when father steeled me against conceding a point. Ever the same collected and analytical man, he walked quietly to Norman and put both hands on his shoulders.

"Do you think, Norman, that Frizzie could refuse you after a speech like that? I don't."

Why did he say it? Why did he dare me, defy me? Why did he rouse all the sleeping little devils in me again? Why, why? Men are so foolish sometimes I believe they never will understand women. I know I cannot understand them. If father could not rule by force he would rule by stealth. Of course, I should have dismissed him from consideration but how was anybody to reflect in such a crisis? I am not one of the angelic few, who stop to reason in the heat of battle. And I was headstrong and wilful and spiteful enough to let that interference of father's turn the scale. I stormed like a little fury. I railed at father and Mrs. Clark and at Norman. I refused to stop; I continued against efforts at interruption until my fiery outpouring was brought to an end by emotional exhaustion. I glanced around and saw only unfriendly faces. That was enough. Without another word I rushed from the room, across the hall, and out of the house.

I halted on the doorstep, but the sound of excited voices behind me sent me fleeing down the driveway. I went on under the arching trees, and I was close to the wrought-iron gate at the highway when Norman's call reached me.

"Frizzie! Frizzie!" came his voice, and I hurried to the gate and turned with my back against it. I received Norman with laughter; just why I did so I couldn't tell. I did

not shrink from him. I did not feel depressed at his presence. Rather I was glad he was there with me, and my gaiety rose as I swung open the gate and caught him by the sleeve and dragged him into the roadway.

"Come, come, Norman," I cried, "away, away down the road."

He went with me, not unwillingly, and we had reached a turn at the foot of the hill where the woods gave way to the patchwork of fields, when we came upon a young man stretched flat in the dust working with the motor of an automobile.

He heard our footsteps, drew himself out and rested on one knee as if to wait for us to pass. I saw a smile spread over his begrimed face. He sprang to his feet and stepped forward with his hand held out to Norman.

"Why, hello, Clark," he said in good cheer, "who would have thought of meeting you here!"

"Hello, Wesson," responded Norman, with more animation than was usual with him. "Where did you drop from?"

"I'm headed for pop's place down near the end of the Island, and it's just my luck to have this car break down. I haven't seen you since we left college, Clark. Where have you been hiding yourself?"

Norman did not answer the question, but introduced Mr. Wesson to me, and I was unable to still a fluttering of my heart. The name of Wesson was not unfamiliar to me. I had heard Norman speak of all his classmates in Yale. Three years before, when he returned from college, he was full of college songs, and his mother grumbled because of his mine of college slang. "Never mind, my dear," Mr. Clark used to say, "the boy will get over it. They all do." And Norman did get over it. Perhaps it was because of the impatient criticism of his mother;

perhaps it was because of the general effect of the prosaic surroundings in which he moved. I never could decide those things to my satisfaction, but before I had been five minutes in the presence of Mr. Wesson I became conscious that a wonderful change had been wrought in Norman. Three years had robbed him of a liveliness, a zest, an enthusiasm in living; he had become solid and serious. It seemed he was gradually fitting into the drabness of the life around him. It impressed me that Norman used to be like Mr. Wesson, and I never stopped to ask myself what there really was to choose between them. Girls of my years, I very much doubt, do not look beneath the surface. All I realized or cared for then was that Mr. Wesson afforded something that I thought was missing in Norman. The truth of it was, I was promptly carried away by the young stranger.

I cannot resist the temptation to predict you will say, "What an utterly foolish girl!" And the only defense I can offer is the question: "Was there ever a foolish girl?" For my part, without a moment's hesitation, I answer: "Not one." I cannot give a reason for my belief, yet I am encouraged in the thought that I am not a victim of blind optimism, or blind vanity. When I depend for argument upon popular prejudices I condemn myself forthwith, but where is the girl so pitifully practical as to ponder gravely these outward forms?

It was enough that Mr. Wesson interested me—interested me greatly. I did not imagine for a moment I could fall in love with him, but I liked the breeziness of him; I liked his frankness, his perfect confidence in himself.

His whole bearing pleased me. I felt he was a man to trust. There was a wholesome ring in his laugh. There was a flattering consideration in his manner that I never

looked for in Norman until Mr. Wesson made its absence so apparent.

In short, the young man stirred new feelings within me. He gave me new thoughts, and I am constrained to confess to you that had it come in that very first moment to a choice between Norman and his friend I should unhesitatingly have given my hand to Mr. Wesson. I should have been ready even to forego all my fancies about love, and what I thought love meant.

What shall you and I, in our experience and wisdom of the present, say of it all? Just this: So the world goes and we live and learn!

CHAPTER VIII

MR. WESSON had been down again under the automobile for ten minutes or more, before he arose and began to knock the dust out of his clothes with his open hands.

"I've got it at last," he said, with gratification in his voice. "It's taken me more than an hour, but I'm lucky I haven't to get a farmer to tow me home. You have a car, of course, Clark, and you know what tinkering it means?"

"No," replied Norman, "I'd rather have a fast horse any day."

"It's great sport, though," laughed Mr. Wesson. "There's so much trouble making them go." He smiled invitingly upon me. "Do you care for a spin, Miss Peabody?"

"I should be delighted, Mr. Wesson," I replied.

"Well, into the tonneau, both of you," he said spiritedly, "and just say where you wish to go."

Norman seemed inclined to hold back, but I pulled him in after me. "Could you take us to the sea, Mr. Wesson?" I asked.

"Why, that's hardly far enough to give the car a good start," he laughed, and we were off.

The wind played pranks with my hair and brought red to my cheeks. I fancied myself freer than ever before in my life; the country, as it rose in front and shot past out of sight, seemed to take on a new meaning for me. It was such a little place! It was so easy to run away from it!

Free! Free! That was it. I felt the freedom in my veins, in every nerve and fibre of me. At first I clung to Norman, but I quickly overcame timidity, and drew aside from him to sit there strong and pliant, responding to every motion of the machine, thinking myself a part of it, and glorying in a spirit of independence.

We came to familiar ground, and I leaned forward. "Go slowly now, please, Mr. Wesson?" I requested. He brought the automobile almost to a standstill.

"What an ideal spot!" he said, and I could not mistake his earnestness.

"Ideal?" I asked in surprise.

"Yes," he returned, "with the woods making a frame for the house, and the view of the beach and the sea. It's all ideal."

I was silent in thought. What a contrary world it was! What did one know of it? I felt the wheels spin rapidly again. The wind now smote me sharply in the cheeks, and it carried the salty breath of the ocean. We ran out into the open until the Atlantic rolled almost up to us. Once more the pace slackened.

"Here we are, Miss Peabody—at the sea," said Mr. Wesson. "That's what I call an inspiring view."

"Do you really think so, Mr. Wesson?" I asked.

"Of course," he replied. "Look. You might think it was a great burnished shield that the sun had laid across the earth. To me there's nothing quite so good as the sea with the sun upon it."

My heart beat in joy at the news. I forgot Norman sitting beside me. I gave myself to dreams—delicious dreams. I was not awakened even when I found we were heading into the dreariness of the woods. Norman sought to engage me in conversation as we followed a circuitous sweep to The Beeches. I answered his many questions

almost mechanically. It was not until Mr. Wesson stopped the car at the wrought-iron gate that I roused myself to action. I deliberately left a glove on the seat, and stepped out and faced Mr. Wesson, standing with his cap in his hand. "My glove; my glove, Norman," I said, with excitement I could not hide, but the meaning of which he mistook. I saw Norman step into the tonneau. I felt my face grow crimson but I did not flinch.

"Please come to-morrow—to the sea?" I asked.

Mr. Wesson gazed open-eyed at me, but gathered himself quickly. "At three," he said, and I turned and in my confusion almost snatched the glove from Norman. He might have read me, but he was free of suspicion.

"Good-by, Mr. Wesson," I said, and barely touched his fingers. I went straight to the gate and turned there and felt a pang of guilt as Norman took Mr. Wesson's hand in a hearty shake. Mr. Wesson did not look back, but I could not resist the impulse to wave the glove in his direction, as the car was hidden in the dust it lifted from the road. Oh, simple maiden!

CHAPTER IX

BREAKFAST was over, and I began to count the hours. How many were there? One, two, three—seven hours—a day—an age! Father had remained silent, and I was thankful for that. I could see Mother Ann was anxious to know what had happened at The Beeches, but I gave her no opportunity to question me. From the breakfast table I went out on the veranda. Nipper came wriggling a morning greeting. I sent him away shrinking, with an impatient command. I wandered around the house, and roamed from room to room. I tried in vain to interest myself in a book, which in contradictory goodness I had drawn from one of the shelves in father's library. Luncheon passed without a word on the great problem. I went to my room, locked myself in, and attired myself in one of my plainest and, I was sure, prettiest white dresses. I spent minutes tying a ribbon in the back of my hair. I went out to the road, and with a few wild flowers in my hand waited and watched.

He came as I knew he would—around by the sea. My heart leaped when I saw him; it thrilled with a sense of kinship, aye, of proprietorship. I thought he had traveled that way to pay tribute to me. He responded to the desire in me. He followed a golden path. He was a Prince Charming making fit approach to my knoll, to my sanctuary, which suddenly was a spot not lonely and desolate, I was convinced, but a place alive with all the world, smiling for him and me.

He tried to remonstrate, but I would not listen. He was mine for that hour; mine to manage as I pleased; mine to glory over to myself; mine to sit and admire; mine to paint in rainbow colors as the man of all men—the man before whom to bare every secret, the man to laugh and to sing with me and, perchance, to cry.

I led him there, going so swiftly along the beaten track that he laughingly besought me not to outdistance him. I showed him my seat. I placed him in it, feeling as if I were bestowing a king on his throne. And so I was, for I affirm that for me that day a king held court, and I was the favored *débutante*, in my train and my jewels, bending the knee before him. Why, even the Atlantic put its white ruffles in order and paraded in slow dignity to the foot of the seat of His Imperial Majesty. Oh, dreams of girlhood! Had I died then angels would have borne me off in a hammock of silver cords. Dreams, dreams! Bless them one and all, for they must be born of another and a better world.

Was I wrong? Was I misguided? Ah, well; judge me harshly; measure me by your conventions; reprove me by your formalities; laugh at me in your worldly wisdom, but, I implore, spare the last bitter word until you have tried to see as I saw. I know otherwise now, but, but—those everlasting, uncontrollable butts!—but how do I know? Dear, dear; there it is once more! I lead you back to that question of experience again.

“Why don’t you go to the city?” That was what he said when I had told him all, and I sprang to the thought. All, all I told him sitting there. Looking up into his open, sympathetic face, I poured out the whole painful story. I told him of Norman, of father, of Mrs. Clark, of Mr. Clark, of my isolation, of my yearnings, and of my drifting toward despair. And he seemed to feel so deeply for

me, seemed to have so complete grasp of the woe of me, that after the last word had been spoken I felt as if I had been relieved of a crushing, terrible burden. Neither was I mistaken, I am sure to this hour, only at that time I did not know that every saint is a sinner and every sinner a saint.

We walked back to the automobile hand in hand. We actually did, and I confess to a twinge of regret because he did not manifest a desire to kiss me. Not that I should have permitted it. Oh, no; only that such feelings will take hold of us at times, and whether wicked or not explain them away we cannot.

I believed him—honestly, honestly, I did—when he told me I was wasted in such a desolate corner of creation; when he declared I was mentally far above father and Norman and Mrs. Clark. Could I think to the contrary? Impossible, because such a lurking notion had suggested itself to me more than once, and besides how was I to resist the flattery in the argument? "You were born to take the world captive," he said, and I believed that, too. *Poor Frizzie*, I say to myself now when I think of it. *Poor Frizzie*. I have no defense. I am tempted, but I have not the assurance to resort to the plea I was merely a woman, a very young and a very foolish, reckless one at that.

But never mind; we shall pass on. He rode away, and after he had turned the corner I kissed my hand in that direction. I returned to my home with light steps, keeping time to the song that was in my heart. All the world was bright, all merriment, all gladness. Away with pining and gloomy reflection and dull brooding and pressing care! On with laughter and gaiety, joy and content! The old earth spins merrily under dancing feet, and the heavens themselves are gay!

CHAPTER X

FROM the gate I saw father in the library, bent over his desk as usual. I went to him and put my arms around his neck, and whispered in his ear :

"Daddy, daddy ; I've got something to tell you. Can you guess ?"

An expectant smile lighted his face. "I'm sure I can't guess, Frizzie," he said." I caught him closer.

"I will marry Norman," I said.

He arose from his chair, almost lifting me off my feet with him, and caught me in a hearty embrace.

"I knew you would come to your senses, my child," he said. "God bless you, Frizzie, and make you happy ; you are your father's daughter, after all."

"I know I am my father's daughter," I said, and the truth was hidden from him. He telephoned to The Beeches. Mrs. Clark answered the call, and she fairly made the wire thrill with her exclamations of elation and selfish rejoicing. She spoke to me, after she had expended some of her enthusiasm on father. Norman was out, she said, grieving somewhere, but she would find him ; she would find him in a trice, and she would ride over with him—and all that had happened would be a secret forever from the gossips of Suffolk County. She would bring my wedding dress, too. Only that very hour she had received it, and it was beautiful.

"Happiness is no word for the way I feel at present," she said at last. "You'll be the pride of Norman and myself—the pride of us all."

"I will try to merit your faith in me, Mrs. Clark," I replied.

"No fear about that, Frizzie," she responded. "I shall see you in just one hour and give you a mother's kiss. Good-by, my darling."

I got the kiss as she promised. She was quick enough this time to alight unaided from the faded carriage. She wrapped me in an embrace that almost moved me to resistance. But I endured it, because the lightness in me was not so easily dispelled as that. I had initiative of my own. I implanted a kiss squarely on the right cheek of Mr. Clark, the first I had ever given that adorable old man. Norman hung back embarrassed. His cheeks were flushed and he shifted nervously on his feet. I went over to him and kissed him boldly, to the unbounded delight of Mrs. Clark. Such hugging and such kissing! I even kissed father, and I made Mrs. Clark's joy complete by giving her a smack of my own free will. I did it all realistically, too; I prided myself on that. Not one suspected. When I look back upon that scene now, really I think I was born to be a great actress.

The liveliness of the dinner table; the hum of animated conversation; the laughter, the jests, the fun about the bridegroom Norman would make, about the nervousness of all bridegrooms, about them sometimes forgetting the ring; the free advice to Norman and to me; the talk of plans, of the coming of the best man—all the way from New Jersey, mind you—and, favorite topic of Mrs. Clark, the care I should exercise in my passing as a bride under the eyes of the pick of the permanent society of Suffolk County! Such a dinner as it was! Even father himself relaxed, cracked jokes and laughed over them. Even Mr. Clark enlivened the occasion, and was moved to declare he felt younger by twenty years. Why shouldn't he, the

dear old man, with the thongs of his bondage loosened for once? No dejection, no gloom, no bitterness, no animosity entered there. All was playfulness and mirth, and I myself was jolliest of all. None reading my secret, none suspecting it—none save Mother Ann, gliding noiselessly in and out, and casting reproachful eyes at me as she circled the table.

And at the end, Mrs. Clark insistent to put me in my wedding dress. Not a glimpse might the men steal, she said; the blinds in my room were drawn carefully and the door locked. Such fitting and such praising! Did Mrs. Clark ever look upon so pretty a bride? Not one in all her long list of brides, and the dress! Ah, the dress—it was perfection itself; flawless in every line and seam; not an alteration to make; not one more thing to do except to catch the one last button in the middle of my back, which Mrs. Clark left unfastened at the dictate of a superstitious scruple.

I stood forth and inspected myself in the mirror, and right proud I felt. It was not an elaborate creation, but it was the best Covey could produce, and I was not exacting in those days as I am now. "It is *my* wedding dress, Mrs. Clark," I said, not without emotion, but emotion far removed from any thought of Norman's mother just then.

"Yes, your wedding dress, Frizzie," she said, "and I cannot tell you how pretty and winning you look in it."

I fairly beamed upon her, and of course she imagined it was because of the compliment she had paid me. Perhaps that had something to do with it, but at bottom I was actuated by another motive.

"Do you really and truly think I am pretty and winning in *my wedding dress*, Mrs. Clark?" I asked.

"I do, Frizzie," she replied. "I do. You satisfy my every wish. I always intended my Norman should marry,

only the prettiest girl in the county, and there's none prettier than you."

The littleness of her! I turned my head away to hide my resentment at her selfishness. I was glad I had been so emphatic in speaking about *my wedding dress*, and thereby sowing the seeds for bitter reflection in the not distant future. Mrs. Clark was in need of a good lesson, and I vowed to my secret self I would give it to her.

Mrs. Clark assisted me in putting the dress away in a corner closet which I cleared specially for its reception. We descended the stairs together, Mrs. Clark with her hand laid affectionately on my shoulder, and in the parlor there was a renewal of the round of laughter and innocent chaffing. The congratulations to Norman were repeated. Again I insisted I was no less an object of congratulation, and so it went for a full hour, when Mrs. Clark spoke the last word with the exclamation:

"Only four days to the wedding now, Frizzie. My, what a narrow escape you gave us!"

They drove off with much noisy merriment. Mrs. Clark, of course, was busy with her cackling—even busier than usual—Mr. Clark thought it incumbent to join in with loud expressions of satisfaction; Norman remembered something to shout back when they were out through the gate; and even father so far forgot himself as to send a message after them when they were just turning the corner out of sight.

Away, away they went, and I almost shivered when father drew me close to him and guided me indoors. What a transformation had been wrought in them all! Father was not the same man now. He warmed toward me in frank affection. He praised me. He told me of his admiration, of the wonderful depths of his parental affection. And I listened respectfully. I concealed my

temper. I did not betray by word or look or gesture the spirit of revenge that stirred within me.

I was not so contained when I was in my room, with no one to see. I stood before the glass and let my feelings express themselves in my face. My good looks were not enhanced, but I did not care for that. I knew the reason for the change in them one and all. It was because I had consented to sacrifice myself; it was because I had consented to subject my will to the will of father and to the will of that hated woman.

All was changed! Because I offered myself a sacrifice, it was peace instead of war, calm instead of storm, smiles instead of frowns. All changed—a blithesome spirit in the house; peals of laughter in the hall; light footsteps on the stairs; sunshine and springtime; incense in the air, and in the distance the soft, clear summons of the wedding bell!

Not another hard word; not another thought for me. No kind, sympathetic curiosity or inquiry as to whether every little fear, every little doubt, had been dispelled. Lonely before, lonelier now! I had rebelled; I had surrendered, and all was well. But was it? *Only four days to the wedding*, Mrs. Clark had said. Well, well. Four days!

CHAPTER XI

ALL was in readiness. The hurry and bustle, the coming and the going were past. Aunts and cousins and other relatives had come from here and there and everywhere. I made the acquaintance of most of them for the first time. They saw a strong family resemblance in me; they dinned my ears with praise of Norman. They saw Mrs. Clark at her very best, and they praised her, too. Some of them were stopping at The Beeches; some were here in the house with father and me.

I took the preparations quietly. I went to the little church in Covey and approved the floral decorations. I was permitted to peep at the wedding cake, which Mrs. Clark herself concocted and baked. I was led covertly by the proud mother into the ancestral hall of the Clarks, and I was sincere in my admiration of its arrangement for the great festivities. It was there the wedding feast was to be held. Thus early Mrs. Clark was to be a mother to me; and the guests would not be cramped and crowded as in our own comparatively little home.

The last good-night had been said, and now all was still. Father was the last to leave me. He kissed me, and I thought I detected tears in his eyes. "It will be lonely here without you, Frizzie," he said, and he little thought of what he spoke.

I had no regret for what I had done. Instead of that, I was filled with a sense of elation, of joyous expectancy and of sweet content. At last it was to be freedom. Free-

dom, like the freedom of a bird on the wing; I was to be free as the wind itself. My wind blowing over the sea, and my sea rolling as it willed—they were to be no freer than I! The way had opened. It was impossible that I should languish there, so away and leave dismay behind.

All was very, very still. I strained to listen, and the only sound I heard was the tick, tick of the little clock on the table near the head of my bed. The only light in the house was here in my room. My room! It had been mine since I could remember. The paper was mine, the pictures were mine, this wicker chair, this dressing-table—the whole room was mine! There had been no restraint here, and for that I was thankful.

I had bought those curtains—how proud I was that day!—and I had hung them there where they were now. I had arranged that corner, with its chintz-covered couch and its corded and tasseled pillows. Well, good-by; I would hold this room always in affection, aye, with something more than that. It was all mine and it was all a part of me. It could not be taken from me; I could not lose it if I would. It would go with me wherever I went; it was not material any longer. It might live only as a memory, but a memory radiant and tender. Here to this room had I come in my tears of joy and my tears of sorrow; here had I worn my moods away; here had I tried to reason; here had I dreamed. My room—always, always, my room!

I took out my wedding dress and worked myself into it and gazed at myself in the mirror. Mrs. Clark was right. I was pretty. My wedding dress! Taking it off and not to put it on to-morrow—forever! Please don't persist. I shrink even now from dwelling upon that moment. I put the dress back in the closet, but I could not close the door. I took it out again and folded it on the bed and

placed it in my little satchel. It was mine, too, and some day—who knows?

I packed in silver articles and other things, and placed the satchel at the door. Then I sat down at my little desk and wrote a letter to father. Would you care to read it? Girls write such foolish letters, you know! Still, you may be curious, and—well, here goes:

“DEAR FATHER,—You needn’t try to follow me. I’ll never come back; never, never, never! I’m sorry, but I can’t help it. I can’t stand Mrs. Clark. I don’t love Norman—I’m sure of that now. I told you that, but you didn’t seem to care. You just wanted me to please yourself, not to please myself. Mrs. Clark was the same, and I won’t do it—not in all my life. If you had not been so hard and commanding; if Mrs. Clark had not been so little and mean and overbearing; if Norman had been a little more of himself and less of somebody else, all might have been different, but it’s too late now. I’m going, and I’m glad, I’m rejoiced, I’m going! And now at the very last moment, I’ll tell you that if happiness never comes to me, if I never find it, I’ll never blame you. No, never. I’ll not even blame Mrs. Clark—I forgive her now, I forgive you one and all, and I promise that always I’ll think with kindness of Norman. It’s the most I can do. But Norman has done nothing. I might have learned to love him had he been left alone—if the two of us had been free to meet each other and come and go without interference from you all—so much wiser than ourselves! It’s only this, father: I’m going away to live my own life, and not to have some one else try to live it for me. You wouldn’t want somebody else to live your life for you, and I won’t, although I’m only a girl. I tried to make you see Norman as I saw him—just as a man, a plain, every-

day man. That's all, and I cannot resist the feeling to wish for something more. Could you, father, if you were in my place? But that's foolish, for you're just a man, too, like Norman. I'll be all right; please don't worry about me. I've thought of all this for days and days, and I never thought of the wedding. Good-by, father. Tell Norman I wanted to write to him, but I was afraid."

Nothing more, except the little word "Frizzie" at the end. I folded the letter, sealed it in an envelope and slipped it under a corner of the inkstand. I crossed to the dressing-table and took my silver purse—a gift from Norman—and went to the door and lifted the satchel. I felt a rush of emotion. I let the satchel fall from my hand, and ran back to the bed and dropped on my knees. I was old-fashioned enough for that, and, thank God, I'm old-fashioned enough for it yet. Father's training had not been all in vain.

I arose composed and with a sense of comfort. But again I turned from the door, this time to turn the lamp low, until the room was suffused with soft shadows. I went out into the hall, there rested the satchel very softly on the floor, and slipped back once more. I stood still with my hands clasped together, between the bed and the dressing-table. It seemed to me there was a great peace there, and the peace seemed to mock the restlessness in my heart. I ran swiftly and pressed my lips against each of the four walls, then passing out rapidly, as if afraid to trust my feelings, I closed the door behind me.

I went noiselessly down to the turn of the stairs, where instinctively I stopped to listen. Not a sound. I went down a few steps more, and in the first glimmer of the dawn I saw a figure between the portières leading into the parlor. My heart almost stopped beating. I was motion-

less in genuine terror. I knew it to be Mother Ann, but I could not utter a word.

It must have been a minute we remained there motionless and silent. Gradually I made out that her dear old face was turned toward me in kindness, and that she was as frail under emotion as I myself. My fear left me, but I could not keep back the tears. I was almost choking. I put down the satchel and with what little order I could command, went straight to her. She held her arms wide to me, and folded me to her breast.

"Oh, Mother Ann, Mother Ann," I sobbed, and could not say more.

"I knew this was what it was coming to," she said, bravely drying her eyes. "I knew it. But you're not going, Miss Frizzie?"

I pulled myself away. "Yes, I am going, Mother Ann," I said. "Why should I stay here?"

"Hush, hush, Miss Frizzie, or they'll hear you." I quailed in fear. "Come in here, into the kitchen, child, and we'll close the door and talk." I followed her, and found a lamp burning and two dining-room chairs beside the kitchen table.

"You expected all this?" I asked.

"I saw the light under the door of your room, Miss Frizzie."

I was not pleased. Neither was I flattered. I thought I was safe in possession of my secret, yet Mother Ann knew all. She gently but firmly pressed me into one of the chairs, and seated herself opposite me.

"Do you know what you're about, Miss Frizzie?" she asked. "You're going to New York, and tell me now, what will you do when you get there?"

"What shall I do here, Mother Ann?"

"I'm ashamed of you, Miss Frizzie," she said. "Where's

the spirit in you? Stand up and say you won't marry him. And if nobody backs you I'll back you. I'll back you, Miss Frizzie, if it means that I'll never pass word with the rector again. Stand up this morning when they're all here, and say you won't marry him."

"I can't, Mother Ann, I can't."

"Then stand up in the church and say you won't. Fix your mind on it now. Say it over and over to yourself when you're driving to the church, so that you'll have the courage; and at the last minute rise up and say you won't. Do that and it'll be an end of it. It'll be all over and you'll come back singing to me, and in a month or two some young fellow will come riding down the road and carry you off. That's what you want, isn't it, Miss Frizzie?"

"I'll go away, Mother Ann, I'll go away," I said.

"You mustn't do that, you mustn't, Miss Frizzie. Think of what it means to your father. Think of what it means to me. You're almost my very own, Miss Frizzie. I can't bear to see you leave us. Why, child, it was you kept me from fretting my life away over that scamp of a husband of mine. It was me raised you, Miss Frizzie. If I've never said so before to a soul but myself, you're my child as much as your father's. It was me put the woman in you, and it's me that's proud of you this minute."

"I'm going, Mother Ann," I said. "I have the two hundred dollars father has given me."

"If it was myself I wouldn't care," she replied. "But to turn you out like this, Miss Frizzie! It's like turning you out to a pack of wolves."

"I will go, Mother Ann," I said firmly.

"I knew all along this would be the end of it," she lamented. "I saw it in you, Miss Frizzie. Not one of

them could reada you like me, and how could they, with me reading you since you had the strength to put a foot under you? If there had been any one else but me? But what could I do in all this? If I'd said a word your father would have snapped my head off and sent me out of the house—away from you. I couldn't take chances with that, and I couldn't begin to tell you what to do, as they tried to tell you. One woman can't tell another woman, not even if one woman's gray-headed and the other's turning sixteen. If they'd only let you alone—but they did they best they knew, Miss Frizzie. Don't forget that. Your father used to be kind and all that to your mother, but he never loved her the way her big heart wanted him to. It was me saw that long ago, and your father's doing by you as he did by your mother, Miss Frizzie—he's doing all he knows, all that's in him, and you can't ask more of him. You can't make over people to suit you, Miss Frizzie, and there's more women like Mrs. Clark in the world than there's women like you and me. I'm older than you are, and that's gospel truth; and lots of women would do the same as Mrs. Clark, and think your money would look well and come in handy added to the money of her son. It's only money makes marrying a bother. But, money or not, you can't tell what will happen after the wedding. Look at me, Miss Frizzie. I just walked off to the church, and in six months I was a grass widow; and I'm a grass widow yet. If there'd been any money between us maybe he wouldn't have run away, so you see there's two sides to every case." In the brightening light I saw the anxious look fade from her face, and she smiled as she bent nearer. "I don't blame you, Miss Frizzie. I might do it myself. But you won't go, you won't go? Take an old woman's advice for once. Stay and fight it out."

"I won't, Mother Ann," I said. "I am going at once." I arose, and she caught me by the arms.

"I can't stand it, Miss Frizzie, you don't know what you're facing," she entreated. "Tell me, who put this in your head? There was some one. I've known it all along. It was in your eyes, which were dancing, when you came back that day with the wild flowers all crushed and broken in your hands. Tell me?"

"How could you guess?" I asked. "Mother Ann, you saw me on the knoll?"

She hung her head for a moment in guilt, then she looked at me boldly. "I only happened out there, Miss Frizzie, but if that hadn't been it, maybe I'd have gone any way; for you're the very life of me, and all that's wrong is that you've had not a mother's soul to fit into your own and be over you."

"I forgive you, Mother Ann," I said.

"Don't go near that young Wesson," she went on. She saw my look of amazement. "I know him. He's been down near here every summer these years and years. I've heard about him, and you haven't, and he means only harm to you, Miss Frizzie. Never go near him unless he's promised, and it's to marry you. I can't bear it; I won't let you go like that, Miss Frizzie. I won't; I'll call your father and hold you."

"Don't you dare do that, Mother Ann," I said.

"No, I won't, I didn't think when I said it," she replied. "It's his own doing and not yours, Miss Frizzie, but you'll not let Wesson take your soul away from you? Miss Frizzie, if you only knew the danger you're running into! If Wesson doesn't mean to marry you he means to sell you, and you love him, Miss Frizzie, you do—I know that—I've seen it in you. Does he love you, Miss Frizzie? If you tell me he does, I'll let you go and I'll watch for

you to come back happy. Does he love you, Miss Frizzie?"

"I feel it in my heart, Mother Ann," I answered.

"Then I'm hardly frightened to let you go, Miss Frizzie, for the heart is the only guard we women have. But be sure, be sure, for we all make mistakes."

I moved to the door. "I won't make a mistake, Mother Ann," I said.

She ran after me and seized me in her arms. "Oh, I can't let you go, I can't, I can't," she cried. "Stay and fight it out. Stay and have Mr. Wesson come to the house and stand up beside you and say he'll marry you, and it'll be all right."

I kissed her. "Good-by, Mother Ann," I said. "I am fully decided, and if Mr. Wesson were to come here now to marry me I should go just the same."

She embraced me, and caressed me with tears streaming down her cheeks. "I won't say more, Miss Frizzie. But, God knows, if I hadn't made a mess of my own life I'd be with them in trying to make you marry Mr. Clark. But it would be better you were carried home dead than married against your will. Good-by, Frizzie, and God look down on you. If you want me call me and I'll come—your own Mother Ann."

I turned at the gate. Mother Ann was in the door, trying to lift her hand. Where the wood cut off the lawn, I turned again. She still was there, and her hand went to her lips. I took another step, and the corner of the wood entered as a wedge between us.

CHAPTER XII

IMAGINE me! Fit me together bit by bit, in my odd, modest, neat, little country dress, my foolish little hat, my funny little satchel, with its imitation leather and its shining brass clasps, and my frank, confiding, weather-blown face. I know you will laugh. I know you will say:

"Same old story! They all come to the city and the city is hard on them—the goody-goody girls!"

Laugh away. I don't care. That's the way of the world when it does not pause to think. Laugh, laugh! You have truth on your side, and, I maintain, so have I. It is the same old story, but, happy fact, there are variations to every story, just as I hope you will find variations in mine. Pray, what is the whole world itself only an old story? Of course, it is, and yet I'm not satisfied with that narrow definition. Now and then when I wonder what I am, I feel that with each new experience, with each discovery of a new truth, the world renews its youth. You of the cities! Who are you, what are you that you dare to laugh at me? You cannot answer? Neither can I. We mortals all are such enigmas; we all are so uncharitable! The child of the city is lost in the country; the child of the country is lost in the city! There we are—give and take on both sides. The score is even between us, and strangers in city or country are not lost for long. We are adaptable creatures; revolution in our lives, after the first shock of surprise, becomes more or less of an unconscious process. Isn't that it?

But there, enough of my homely, apparent philosophy! I know it is silly of me to ramble off in this manner, especially when everybody is philosopher to himself. I implore your pardon for these harmless digressions. It is only that I cannot resist the temptation to show how smart I am; in fact, this weakness has become a habit with me.

The city had a disappointing effect upon me. I think the first glimpse of a city is like the first view of Niagara. I did not stand in awe of Niagara until I had seen it three times. Now when I gaze upon it I ask myself if I ever shall find it within me to accord it appreciation? The might, the majesty, the sameness, the variety, the eternity of it! So with the imperious, complacent, colossal place to which I turned my face. I did not realize the magnitude, the substantial grandeur, of it; the mass and the rush of things were too much for my puny senses to embrace. It was a magnificent muddle; it was a living panorama, which it took me months and months to dissect a little and examine in detail.

In the train I had time for reflection, and I made two resolutions. One was to put my home out of mind, the other was to carry myself with independence. I never had been a dependent, I assured myself, and I could not be one now. I vowed I would support myself; I entertained pride in what I took to be sturdiness of disposition. Without the slightest knowledge of anything to which I might turn my hand, I still was supremely confident there must be for me some place, some nook, some cranny, where I might be cramped, perhaps—but, above all things, free.

I was all contrast, too. I remember I carried a card in the hollow of my left hand under my glove, and that I pressed the tips of my fingers into it, lest by an impos-

sible chance it might be wafted away. I even presented it reluctantly to the girl who received me in the entrance to Mr. Wesson's office.

"Why, this is the card of Wesson, Jr.," said the girl, in a tone of surprise that caused me much embarrassment.

"Mr. Wesson told me to present it here and he would know it was from me," I replied.

"You're an innocent kid, for fair," said the girl, with cool emphasis. "Oh, you needn't look indignant," she continued. "I know what that means." She inspected me critically from head to foot. "Well, I'll say for you," she observed, "you're the best-looker of all that's been here yet."

"What do you mean?" I asked with bitter feeling.

"I mean nothing," was her reply, in a rising inflection that confessed evasion. "But I'll tell you this much, Miss Simplicity," she added. "You don't know young Wesson like I know him, and if you only knew him half as well you'd steer clear of him."

"I don't understand," I said.

"Of course you don't, you little child of the country," she responded, in a voice that was rude and yet not without a ring of sympathy toward me. "It's the same with all us girls—we don't understand until understanding is the only satisfaction we've got left. But wait here, wait here," she added with sudden animation, "I like your kind, and I'll find out if Mr. Wesson is in."

She disappeared through a swinging door, and in a few moments returned precipitately.

"I'm sorry, but Mr. Wesson has just stepped out, and it's doubtful when he will return," she said. "It's just as likely as not he won't be back before to-morrow. He's uncertain."

"I must see him; I must see him," I said in alarm. "I cannot wait until to-morrow."

"Have you nothing else to do but wait for him?" she asked.

"Nothing, nothing at all," I replied, and her face lighted up.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," she said. "We'll go to lunch. You'll be my guest. We'll be gone an hour, and then we'll come back here and maybe Mr. Wesson will be in."

"Oh, thank you," I said, and she caught me and pushed me almost roughly into the public hall near the elevators.

"Don't move from there until I join you," she commanded. She rushed back into the office, and in a few moments came running out again, pinning on her hat, and with her coat slung carelessly over her left arm. She hurried me to an elevator, and it was not until we merged with the current of humanity in the street that she ceased to urge me. Then she released a nervous hold on my arm and seemed to breathe easier.

"Sometimes luck *does* favor me," she laughed, and I walked beside her puzzling over the remark.

Five minutes later we stepped from an express elevator into a restaurant covering the top floor of a building, reaching three hundred feet above the sidewalk. We were on the twenty-fifth floor, and from the windows to east and west I saw the city spreading out like an illuminated map. The girl pointed out buildings here and there.

"That grimy little place no bigger than a drygoods box is St. Paul's Church," she said. "In there the sexton will show you George Washington's pew. I've never wanted to see that pew, though; it makes me creepy to think of anything so old."

"It is more than a hundred years old," I said. "I wonder will the pew and the church be there a hundred years from now."

"What difference does it make about that?" she replied. "A hundred years is too far for any woman to think ahead. But before we go any further into the future, we'd better think of something to eat."

"Why did you say after we had left Mr. Wesson's office, 'Sometimes luck *does* favor me'?" I asked, when we had reached ice cream and coffee.

"You've been thinking over that, have you?" said the girl. "I was wondering if you would. Well, I don't mind telling you; I may as well get rid of it now as later. I said I was *lucky sometimes* just because I managed to give the slip to young Wesson."

"You mean Mr. Wesson was in the office when I called?" I asked.

"That's exactly what I mean," she replied. I felt like flying at her. I trembled with anger, but the girl sat quiet and apparently unconcerned.

"You had no right to do that," I said, "and you must take me to Mr. Wesson without delay. If you don't I shall go to him myself and at once."

"Before you start," she said, "let me say a few words to you."

"Why should I let you talk to me?" I replied angrily. "I don't know who you are. I don't even know your name."

"That's easily settled," she responded with cool assurance. "My name's Winifred Caine, but everybody calls me Winnie. They've got a sort of familiar-like name for you, haven't they?"

"I'm known as Frizzie, but my real name is Helen—

Helen Peabody," I replied without thinking. "But you've been very unkind to me."

"You won't say that when you know me better, Frizzie," she said with an ease that compelled laughter on my part. She spoke my name as if she had known me for years, and strongly as I was inclined to it I could not continue to make a show of anger toward her.

"If you promise to take me to Mr. Wesson," I said, "I shall be only too glad to listen to all you've got to say, Winnie."

"Well, I declare, who would have expected that of you!" she responded. "Winnie! Winnie, eh! You're getting on, getting on fast, let me tell you. But here now, this is no time for foolishness. It wasn't for fun or charity I ran the risk of losing my job by taking you out of Wesson's office. Not that I care a whole lot about the old job, but it's easier holding it than looking for another one. Do you want me to talk plain to you?"

"Why, of course, if there is anything to talk plain about," I replied.

"Thanks, I would have talked out whether you had said no or yes—just the same. I was watching for you when you came to-day."

"How did you know to watch?" I asked, surprised.

"I heard your friend Wesson talking. That's all. Of course, he doesn't know I heard, and, of course, you won't tell him?"

"I promise you I won't," I said.

"There's nothing more to tell," she said, then with vigor she continued: "But only this much: Don't you trust that fellow Wesson. Don't trust any man. What did you come up here from the country for? Because Wesson told you the city was the place for you? That was it, of course—I don't have to be told to know that. I've seen

hundreds and hundreds of girls like you come from the country in my time, and let me tell you it's taken not more than a few months to make most of them so there own fathers and mothers wouldn't recognize them. What does Wesson care for you, or any other girl like you? Are you in his set? Have you millions to set against his millions, or the millions his father, when he dies, will throw to him like corn to swine? Do you think you're going to marry him, then? Get all crazy notions like that out of your head. Don't go near Wesson. Stick by me and I'll stick by you, and with the help of us both you'll pull through; and when the day comes for you to go back to the country where you came from, you can go without being ashamed."

"I'll never go back to the country," I avowed.

"Well, that can wait awhile," retorted the girl. "What are you going to do now? Are you going back with me to Wesson's office? You'll find him there. I'll take your card into him, and you'll walk into his private office and it'll be the same as if we never sat here together, with me making a fool of myself by ever opening my mouth."

"I'm in doubt, Winnie," I said earnestly.

"Put it off till to-morrow then," she advised. "Get a home, get some place or other behind you before you go near his office. What would you do or say now if you went to him without a room or some place to cling to? Here, I've got it. Go and deposit yourself in that hotel for women. I've never been near it, but it's a fine place, even if it hasn't got all the disadvantages of a home."

"I will go there," I said, moved to it more by her breezy assertiveness and odd turn of speech, so new and amusing to me, than by faith in her contrary argument.

"You'll like it up there," she went on. "Anyhow, a few days will give you a chance to look around and pick a

boarding-house. You've got to come down to the boarding-house, you know; most of the boarding-house plants come straight from the country. That's what makes boarding-houses so interesting. But you can't tell what will turn up. Get up to the hotel first. Take a car outside here in Park Row, and it'll land you near the door. If they want to give you a dollar and a half room, ask for one at a dollar. You've got a dollar with you, haven't you?"

"I've got two hundred dollars," I said.

"What! You've got two hundred dollars? Whew, say that again—two hundred dollars! If I had two hundred dollars I'd take a trip to Europe. But here, you've got to start, because I've got to show up in the office. I'll see you this evening. Promise me you won't telegraph, telephone, write or show your nose near Wesson before I come up to you. I'll be there at seven-thirty. You can stand waiting till then, Frizzie? I like that name, Frizzie—it's 'cute enough for a song."

"I promise everything," I replied. I was attracted to her, and in the street I held out my hand and said in all sincerity: "You must like me, Winnie."

"Oh, I'll like you all right," she said. "I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't like you more than a little bit, Miss Simplicity."

"You called me that before," I reproved.

"It fits you, doesn't it?" she retorted. "Off with you now. There's your car coming. If I don't run I'll get the bounce sure." With a parting, "See you to-night," she was lost in the restless throng, overflowing the sidewalk into the street. And the throng, never caring, brushed past me on both sides, leaving me lonelier than I ever had been on the deserted shore of the sea I used to call my own.

CHAPTER XIII

So THIS was what it had come to! What a cold, bare, barren, cramped place was this new room of mine. I had not the audacity to call it a home. With narrow shelves around the walls it might have served in a pinch for the kitchen closet in which Mother Ann every summer stored preserves, and which I had raided so often. A miniature bed, a miniature dresser, a miniature chair, a miniature closet, set in a miniature triangle in a miniature corner; a miniature window, miniature curtains, and a miniature design in the miniature rug on the floor! All these and a few other miniature effects might have appeared of normal size to some people, but to me—well, suppose I had had my roomy wicker chair where should I put it? The bed or the chair would have to go, and as I could not sleep out in the hall the bed would gain preference and remain because of its vulgar utility. Perish all sentiment in a hole in the wall!

Strange though it may seem, I was amused by my first experience of one of New York's pet institutions—the compressed room, like compressed dog-biscuit and compressed breakfast-food! New York builds high, I found, and it also builds close together.

I went to the window, parted the curtains and looked out. I saw acres of flat roofs, all a murky brown, with hundreds of bleak chimney tops, like broken trunks in a wood swept out of life and left desolate. Far in the distance I saw a church spire. That was a comfort, but

between me and the church lived how many strangers, and what church was it? It was not the friendly, rolling voice of the tide that rose to me in that hotel window—it was the hard beat of feet and the sharp ring of wheels, making hard and wearing out, I thought, the hearts of men. No accented cadence, no thrill of sweet music in that jarring swell! Gone was my country, gone was my sea, and as I looked out I wondered why I had given them up for colorless monuments of mortar and brick and steel.

I let the curtains fall together and went and sat on the side of the bed. It was the hour in which I was to have become a bride. That was true, and what of it? I felt perfectly composed, perfectly contented. I had followed my will. Life was beginning. Were I turning from the altar now on Norman's arm life would be at an end. I had no fear; my mind was at rest. I felt a delicious sense of physical weariness. I dropped back with my head on the pillow, and the past and the present alike were blotted out.

I was awakened by the buzz of the telephone near the door. The room was thick in the gloom of early night. I groped for the electric button and turned on the light. I took down the telephone receiver, found Winnie was downstairs, and requested her to come up. I went out to receive her in the hall, but she rushed past me, spread a newspaper on the bed and pointed to glaring headlines.

"It that all about you—the headlines and the picture?" she demanded.

"What picture?" I asked.

"There—there in that paper under your eyes."

I looked down and there, sure enough, was an unmistakable likeness of myself; and beside it was a picture of Norman, while below both was a picture of the church,

with a glimpse of the floral decorations for the wedding. A fanciful artist had sketched a grief-stricken Cupid on the steps of the church. Cupid's face was woebegone, tears were rolling down his cheeks; there was a pathetic expression in his eyes, and in his hands were a broken bow and a broken arrow. I raised my head slowly and looked at Winnie in dumb bewilderment.

"Read those headlines," she said, and promptly she read them for me: "*'Deserted at the altar.'* Look at them—in black ink three inches high every letter of them. Listen to this: *'Suffolk County society gets biggest shock in years. Rector's daughter flees from fiancé four hours before time for wedding. Believed to have eloped. Young millionaire of fashionable Southampton set said to be winning suitor. Rumor of an early morning flight by automobile.'*" She dropped the paper and stared at me.

"Oh, Winnie, what shall I do?" I said. "I never thought."

"Of course, you never thought," she replied, "but you thought enough to keep all this from me. I guess, you're not as innocent as you look."

"Oh, Winnie, what shall I do?" I repeated.

"Stay where you are," she replied. "They'll never think of looking for you here. They'll think a women's hotel is the last place a woman would hide. You needn't worry. New York's a big place."

"How did they get all that in the paper, Winnie?"

"The papers thrive on stuff like this," she replied. "If it wasn't for fool women there'd be no papers."

"You don't call me a fool?" I asked hotly.

"Of course, I don't," she returned. "Thank the Lord, it's not ourselves but the other women are the fools. But I don't blame you. I'd have run away in the same fix."

"How did they find out about Mr. Wesson?" I asked.

"They haven't found out," she replied. "Haven't you caught on to our New York newspapers yet? Don't you know that everybody who isn't a candidate for the poor-house is a millionaire with them? The newspapers never would let you elope with anybody but a millionaire, and they'd never let you ride in a train. If you didn't run away in an automobile, you should have—that's the way our newspapers look at it."

"How did they get the photographs, Winnie?"

"That's easy. Bought some photographer, of course. That's one of the main assets of the photographing business nowadays—selling pictures to the newspapers." She folded the newspaper, threw it in a corner, and seated herself on the bed. "Let it lie there," she said. "I'm sick and tired of newspapers. There's nothing to them but breaking of engagements, elopements, weddings, divorces and murders—as if the world never did anything else. They've got all about you in there. I know you as well as if I'd lived in Covey all my life. I wouldn't marry that fellow Clark myself. He took it all so matter-of-fact. He was pale and serious-faced and all that, and he said 'maybe it was for the best.' I hate a man who says, 'maybe it's for the best.' He's got no get-up to him. You're well rid of that Mrs. Clark, too. A terror of a mother-in-law she would have been. Said you'd always been rebellious, and that she had tried to be a mother to you, and that her heart was broken for her son's sake. I must say though, I don't dislike that father of yours. He's a man all right. He's man enough to have his heart breaking without ever showing it. I know that from him saying you were free to go and that he wouldn't follow you, and that if you wanted to return his home always would be open to you."

"How could father do that?" I asked, feeling a little

disappointment. "How could he let me go without trying to find me and bring me back?"

"Your father's the only one down there that's got a grain of common sense," she said. "He knows as well as I know, and as you'll know some day, that the more he'd follow you the more he'd drive you away. Do you think if he came in here this minute and told you to come home with him that you'd go? Horses wouldn't pull you, and the future's up to you, Frizzie."

"It is, Winnie," I said, "and I'm glad."

"I don't know that you've got any call to be glad about it," she said. "You've got yourself into a pretty pickle. I guess there's nothing ahead for you now but to go in the chorus."

"In a play—in a real, real theatre, Winnie?" I asked.

"I thought you'd be excited when I said theatre," she responded. "That's one of the things I came here to warn you about. When Wesson begins to talk theatre to you whistle and look out of the window. They all do that. When one of them has a girl on his hands he tries to run her into the chorus. It's the only way they know of getting rid of some of the responsibility."

"You puzzle me," I said. "Whom do you mean by 'they'?"

"I mean Wesson and all his crew—all who are as black in the soul as he is. I'm not going to tell you again to steer clear of him. It's up to you, not up to me. You've got me into enough trouble already. I've lost my job because of you."

"Winnie, how could that be?" I asked in dismay.

"Easy enough. I was crazy enough to leave that card you gave me on the desk, and he found it and asked me flat if you had been there and I didn't back water or beat around the bush. I told him right out straight. I said

you'd been there and that I'd taken you away, and that I wouldn't let him crucify you if I knew anything about it."

"You told him all that?"

"Yes, and I told him a lot more besides. I told him, for another thing, that you were up here, and that if he carried on as he's done more than a few times I'd make it hot for him. He rose up on his ear, and fired me and here I am."

"I am very, very sorry you were discharged, Winnie," I said.

"Don't trouble yourself about that. I'm not sorry myself. I never liked it down there. The only one who was any good was the old man—old man Wesson, I mean. He's the one can do the business. When he rushes in, takes off his coat, rolls up his sleeves, strips off his tie, and lets his collar hang loose by the button in the back, you ought to see things hum. Old Wesson's the money-maker; young Wesson's the money-spender. If it wasn't for his father Roy Wesson would be an encumbrance to himself and everybody else. He's only one of those fellows who give millionaires a name for being sporty and regular dare-devils and all that and the rest, and still more. If his father would only come up with the cash, he'd have a racing stable and half-a-dozen steam yachts and other such trifles. He'll have them some day—when the old man dies and leaves his life behind him in the shape of twenty millions or so."

"I will never see Mr. Wesson, Winnie," I avowed, thinking at the moment I meant it.

"You won't?" she responded. "Well, that's the only sane thing I've heard from you. Shake him. Drop him like a rattlesnake. You can't trust him, married or single. If you were married he'd break your heart drinking."

was shocked at her words, and I resented them. Whatever Mr. Wesson might be I was sure he was not so depraved as to drink. "Mr. Wesson never, never would betray me by drinking, Winnie," I protested.

"He wouldn't, eh?" she replied. "I've not been down there for a couple of years with my eyes shut. The old man can take it in bucketfuls—he's one of the bomb-proof kind; but the son—well, temptation's been coming his way since he was knee high, and he's no angel. He hasn't got twenty years of dry life on a farm behind him like his father, and I've watched him down there in the office, and the road he's beginning to travel is a slippery one, with a jumping-off place at the end."

"I refuse to believe all you say of Mr. Wesson is true, Winnie," I said, "but I promise you I will not see him."

"We'll see what your promise amounts to," she replied, and just then the telephone rang. "That's Wesson," said Winnie, as she leaned forward expectantly, "and I dare you say no to him." I went to the instrument shaking in trepidation. I took down the receiver and heard his voice. I listened, and turned to Winnie.

"It is Mr. Wesson," I said, "He wishes to come here to the hotel to see me, and what shall I do?"

"Do?" she repeated with bitter sarcasm. "Tell him you'll see him, of course."

I told him that, hung up the receiver, and turned again to Winnie with my cheeks burning. "I couldn't help it, Winnie," I said. "I will see him once, and never again."

"I'll make myself scarce," she said, in a hostile voice. "Yes, you'll see him once! You've only got to promise it and you'll do it. Good-by."

"You're not going, Winnie?" I protested in much alarm.

"Certainly, I'm going," she replied. "You don't think

for a minute I'd stay around here and come between you and Wesson."

"Please don't go?" I pleaded, but she went straight to the door and there glanced back only for a moment.

"Go ahead," she said. "Paddle your own canoe."

I ran toward her with my arms held out entreatingly, but she pulled the door closed after her as she went into the hall. "Winnie! Winnie!" I called. But she did not answer, and I did not have the heart to open the door and follow her.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. WESSON had asked me to meet him in ten minutes. I took the newspaper out of the corner where Winnie had flung it, and dropped it behind the pillow. I pinned on my hat, and went down to find him pacing nervously back and forth between the hotel office and the street. He guided me straight to a two-seated automobile, assisted me into it, took a seat beside me and drove off. We had swung into Fifth Avenue before our words grew beyond bare exclamations of delight at meeting.

"I was anxious to get away from that horrid hotel," laughed Mr. Wesson at length, as he slackened speed and leaned back to let the car roll easily along. "We'll go north to the park for a bite of dinner. I knew you had the pluck to do it. There's an awful fuss over it all, though."

"Do you think the papers will find me, Mr. Wesson?" I asked.

"There's not one chance in a hundred," he replied. "The risk isn't worth thinking about. I've arranged to keep tab on them down in Covey. I've a detective down there, and if they plan to follow you we'll head them off."

"You have a policeman watching father?" I asked.

"No, no," he laughed more heartily. "Only one of those private detectives, who are all men of leisure. I've had him down there two days, so there'll be no suspicion attached to him. He'll just hang around the hotel in the village, absorb all he hears, and some things he doesn't hear, and report every day to me."

"I never heard of a business like that," I said. "It doesn't sound honest."

"It's honest enough," he replied. "We've got private detectives in New York now for a host of things. We couldn't get along without them; they're necessities. Why, nine divorces in ten would fail only for the private detective. They're into everybody's business for three dollars a day, and whatever graft is in it."

"What is graft, Mr. Wesson?" I asked.

"Graft is the unearned perquisite of modern business," he answered.

"I never could comprehend that," I said, joining in his merriment.

"I doubt if I ever could comprehend it myself, but it's the truth," he said. "You needn't fear, Frizzie," he added, and looked ahead in silence for a few moments. "I may call you that I hope, and, of course, you will call me Roy?"

"I shall be greatly pleased," I said, and a second silence between us lasted for a minute or more.

"If one of the reporters runs you down," he said at last, "you've only got to change your hotel and you're lost again. Only if one does find you refuse to talk. In two days you'll be forgotten. Life moves swiftly here in New York. To-morrow some other girl will run away and your case will be ancient history. It's in at one ear and out at the other with New York. There is no yesterday or to-morrow with the newspapers here—it's all to-day. Have no fear, Frizzie, that little newspaper whirlwind will blow over in no time. . . . But let's think of something else. Look about you. Can you imagine where you are now? We're passing through Millionaire's Row—the heart of the renowned and notorious Fifth Avenue. Every house you see stands for one million, or two or

three or maybe half a dozen or a dozen. It's a dingy looking street, isn't it? No one ever would think to look at these houses, stacked together like cards on edge, that Monte Cristo would be a piker in Fifth Avenue. You'll pardon my slang, won't you? Slang is as thick in the New York atmosphere as catarrh. Why, the best Monte Cristo could do with his few kopecks would be to squat in a Harlem flat. I'm afraid I shock you with my talk?"

"I am very much interested in it," I said. "I am thinking of the millions and millions on both sides."

"There are oceans of dollars here—oceans of gold," said Roy.

"It is as if Moses stretched out his hand over the sea," I said, "and we rode between walls of gold."

"That's it exactly," replied Roy, "only I fear if the walls came down the Israelites would be swallowed up with the Egyptians. . . . But here we are at the park entrance, and we will leave Mammon behind. We're altogether too profound. For my part, I can't be intellectual when approaching a restaurant famous for its good cooking."

We sped along a smooth road, that swept around carefully cut curves, with trees giving something of the aspect of an impressive driveway. Beyond the trees was grass that struggled to be green. There was an artificial appearance everywhere that did not please me. It struck me this park showed the city making a poor attempt to improve upon the country. We came to the restaurant, an ugly, misshapen low building, lifted by a low hill out of the shade of the trees, and with shrubbery growing close to it on three sides. An obsequious individual showed us to a table at an open window where there was a view across the tree-tops of the roofs of houses in Fifth Avenue.

"Now we'll start with a little cocktail for an appetizer," said Roy. "Let's try a Manhattan. It's not a bit strong, and it will put us in just the proper humor for dinner."

"No, thank you, Roy," I said. "I have never tasted liquor and I never will." I was very serious, for I was thinking of what Winnie had told me.

"Oh, humbug," he said good-naturedly. "When you're in the city you've got to get over the pious notions of the country. There's nothing wrong in a cocktail. I think a total abstainer is just as intemperate as one who keeps on with his nips and doesn't know when to stop. Anyhow, we know when to stop, and I only suggested it because I thought you'd like to do what New York does."

"No, Roy," I said firmly.

"Very well then," he responded with a smile. "It's settled. We'll lift our spirits on *aqua pura*. It will possess the zest of novelty for me." He saw my dark face. "Now don't look sorrowful over it, Frizzie," he said. "There's nothing to it all. I'm not a lost soul. If everybody who touches a cocktail was beyond salvation New York would be another Sodom."

There were chattering groups at the tables around us, and I had not been seated two minutes before I had lost thought of cocktails and all they might mean to me. I have a serious confession to make, and it is that I grew ashamed of my clothes. There now, scold and revile me! Of course, I was a sinner, still was I not human, was I not a woman? You know, we poor, frail women simply cannot help it. Neither are we seriously to blame for it, because the real sinner is the better-dressed woman who stares at us so brazenly. I quickly came to know I was out of my element there. I was so miserable I had to fight to control an impulse to spring from the table and take to my heels. There is no telling what I should have

done had I not overheard two languid-looking creatures at an adjoining table picking me to pieces. That angered me so much that I silenced them with a stare. Had they uttered another word really I think I should have flown at them. Roy must have understood how I felt, for he said in kindly voice:

"You won't find a particularly select crowd here this late in the afternoon. It's more on the easy-going order, and I don't mind telling you I don't care for it much. But we won't bother, Frizzie. I suppose Winnie Caine has been poisoning your mind against me?"

"She told me to be careful whom I trusted in New York," I admitted frankly, and his face flushed in bitterness.

"I thought that of her," he replied. "That's always the thanks one gets for helping somebody else. I got father to take her down there in the office to meet callers, when there really wasn't any need for her."

"You knew her before she came to work for you?" I asked, unable to restrain my surprise.

"Not at all," he answered directly. "I mean she came in and gave me such a hard-luck story that I induced father to engage her."

"Oh, that's it," I said relieved. "She should have been grateful."

"Instead of that she was prying into everybody's business. I should have let her go long before she tried to keep us apart. Had I not found that card by accident the chances are she never would have opened her mouth about you having been there."

"I should have telephoned to you, or come to you," I said.

"I knew that," he replied, "but just the same I did not

like her interference. Can she influence you against me in the slightest, Frizzie?"

"I don't know," I replied.

"You must know," he persisted, and I weakened.

"She never could have kept us apart, Roy," I said, "never."

"It does me good to hear you say that," he responded. "I thought you wouldn't let her master you, especially after you had the nerve to leave home the way you did."

The mention of home stirred emotion in me. "Now that I am in New York, Roy, what is there for me more than at home?" I asked.

"There's life," he answered. "There's variety. Wait a few days till you get the fever of the city in your blood. You'll never get it out again, and you won't want to. I don't know just what it is gives this fever, but once it gets hold we can't shake it off. Maybe it comes from contact with so many people—the magnetism, the exhilaration that comes from the brushing together of so many minds. We would not like it here were we alone. When you were without anybody to speak to down in the country you were lonely, were you not?"

"I was terribly, terribly lonely," I said. "But, Roy, I should like to see the ocean now. I should like to sit on the knoll where we sat. You remember?"

"I remember," he said. "I remember, and I treasure the memory. I'll tell you what we'll do, Frizzie. Sometime when everything is still, when it is just dawn, we shall go there in the automobile, and we shall sit on the knoll and look at the Atlantic just as we did that afternoon."

"Yes, yes, Roy," I said, "we will do that."

"And we'll run past your home and we'll swing around

by The Beeches—and Covey won't be so far away after all."

"It would be glorious," I said. "I should have it all with me still, and I should also have my freedom. Oh, it's glorious, it's glorious."

I saw his face show irritation. "Hang it," he said, "I thought we'd be left to ourselves here."

"What's wrong, Roy?" I asked.

"Nothing, only there are two girls and a fellow I know over there, and they've spotted us. They're coming over. They don't know enough to stay away." He arose and outwardly, at least, received the newcomers with good grace. Introductions were made quickly and with scant ceremony. My new friends were Miss Camilla Delmont, Miss Beatrice Collins and Mr. Prince Andrews. But I won't stand on formality, because then and thereafter they were Camilla, Betty and Prince.

Camilla was what I should call a tall and rangy girl. She bristled with self-confidence. Her hair was raven black, and there was method in the way she brushed it back without a suggestion of a curling-iron. Had she permitted her luxuriant tresses to fall far enough to hide the tips of her ears she must inevitably have taken on a Madonna-like cast of feature, but there was nothing of the *ingénue* in Camilla to lead her to that. At first glance her face looked like chiseled beauty, but under inspection the beauty faded, became almost negligible, because then her face appeared colder than marble. If anything, her features were too regular. She looked at you with black eyes that seemed to have had all the fire burned out of them. Still I thought that selfishness or malice lurked in their depths. Her eyelashes were long, her brow was high and rounded. She was a supple and yet strong figure in a tight-fitting black silk dress. Her hat and

plumes were black, and altogether it was plain to see Camilla had the sense to know black was her natural and best color.

I felt I could hold myself indifferent to Camilla, yet once or twice I was given to doubt. Despite all her manifest confidence in herself, she did not impress me as satisfied with her lot. I came to think that the dead perfection of her face did not reflect her real or better self. Her face, in truth, seemed to me a mask to hide her true feelings. I took Camilla to be a silent, secretive girl, but not so Betty.

There was more than an ounce of superfluous flesh on Betty, still it would be a libel to call her fat. She was just plump. She was not long waisted and finely curved like Camilla, but short, or even unduly abbreviated. Unlike the flawless neatness of Camilla, too, Betty was positively touseled. Nothing seemed to fit her. Her hair evidently had known chemicals, and the result was an ineffective strawberry verging on a blonde. Her arms were short, and indicative of considerable circumference in ten years, or even five. Her hands were thick and soft and chubby, not firm and slender like Camilla's. Betty's face was full, and frankness itself. There were only shallows in her hazel eyes, yet they were not the eyes of innocence. Betty did not set her lips straight and close as did Camilla, because Camilla was deliberate and decisive, two things Betty could not be if she tried. For Betty, however, it must be told her face contained merriment, genuine good-nature, and seemed a fount of laughter; in contrast to the parched surface of Camilla's. In Betty's face also were warning signals of an honestly hasty temper. Still, whatever Betty might or might not be, she impressed me as a far more likable body than Miss Camilla.

Prince Andrews was a new type to me. He was scrupulously groomed, and of age indefinite. Gray showed in his scanty hair; his cheeks had a redness that did not look healthy, that was not of out-of-doors, but seemed the outcome of much good eating and drinking. His clothes were cut with an evident design of diverting attention from his comfortable rotundity. His hands were soft enough for a woman's, and his nails glistened. His dark mustache was clipped short. His heavy eyebrows gave him somewhat of a studious appearance, but there that part of it ended. His eyes looked at you with cold inquiry out of full sockets. When he smiled it was with an effort, and as if to hide a sneer. I wondered if he possibly could be an intimate of Roy's, for at least he must have been twice Roy's age. How much more was a mystery. And Roy plainly was manly, which Andrews plainly was not.

"Playing hookey, eh, Roy?" said Andrews, as they gathered at the table.

"I thought you had the girls down at Martin's," replied Roy, anything but at his ease.

"Oh, you can never tell where we'll bob up," said Betty, with an asperity that did not escape me.

"I should have preferred Martin's to this place," remarked Camilla, with an air partaking of superior loftiness. "But they would insist on dragging me up here into the wilderness, Roy; and it's such a bore to have to travel all the way back to the theatre."

"Well, I don't know," objected Betty. "I'm for a ride in an auty-me-bubble any old time." There was a laugh, in which I joined, at the jauntiness of her tone. She seemed to resent my part in it, for looking coldly at me, she added: "Of course, everybody around here understands I know enough to say automobile?"

"Certainly we all do, Bet," said Roy.

"Well, I'm not so sure that you do, Mr. Sly," was her sharp retort.

"My suggestion is that we all have a little drink," put in Andrews, as if anxious to change the subject.

"That's good enough for me," smiled Camilla.

"Me, too," hastened Roy nervously.

"I'm not drinking, thank you," said Betty, with an emphasis that froze geniality. She looked straight across the small table at Roy. "How is it, Roy," she asked, "you didn't look over when we came in?"

"Honestly, Bet, I never saw you," defended Roy. "I'll leave it to Frizzie if I did."

"Leave it to her, is it?" said the girl, rolling the words in contempt. "That'd be nice, wouldn't it!"

"Come now, come now, you two are always scrapping," interposed Andrews. "Why don't you get together and have it out good and hard for once and then kiss and make up better friends than before?"

"It's only lately Roy's been this way, and I never scrap if nobody doesn't want to scrap with me, and I'm treated half-way decent," retorted Betty. "But I'm not the kind of girl that goes off in a corner and cries her eyes out when a man gets good and ready to throw her over."

"That's not true, Bet, and you know it," said Roy.

"Well, I'm not saying anything against anybody in particular, but who's to blame for you breaking your date with me this afternoon and throwing me back on Camilla and Prince?"

"Do you mean me?" I asked, unable to restrain my indignation longer.

"I didn't mention your name, did I?" returned the wrathful girl, "but now that you've said it the name fits."

"You know you don't mean a word of all you've said,

Betty," said Camilla, moving herself slowly forward until she was leaning far across the table, and looking at the girl with steady gaze. Betty shifted uneasily. "You know you don't mean it," said Camilla, with more emphasis than before, and Betty brought her hand down on the edge of the table with an impatient gesture.

"What are you talking about, Camilla?" she asked. "Who said there was anything. . . . Make mine a Martini."

I rode back to the hotel wrapt in silence, hardly realizing Roy's feeble attempts to promote conversation. I left him abruptly at the door. I almost ran to the elevator. I raced from the elevator to my room at the end of the hall. I felt I needed a haven, and I thought my room offered it.

CHAPTER XV

Now, WITH the door locked and the blinds drawn, passing the world in review! What a world it was! What a day it had been! Could it be possible that twenty-four hours ago I was in my home with all in readiness for me to go forth to meet my bridegroom? Could it be possible I had known Winnie Caine less than twelve hours? And Roy and Andrews and Camilla and Betty? All possible, all true; experience was crowding, and here I was—alone in the city.

Alone! Alone in that hotel with its hundreds of women. Who were they? Where did they come from? Where were they going? What were their ambitions, what their lives? Answer me one question. And out beyond the hotel, out and out and around and around, there were other hotels, other homes, hundreds and hundreds, thousands and thousands of them—and all strange and closed to me. What if I were to wander out from my room, out from my hotel, and knock at random on a door? Would I recognize a friend? Would a word of welcome greet me? Would the loneliness, once again straining at my heart, find solace in the heart of another? Oh, cold, suspicious, repelling city!

But what's this? Was I giving myself to brooding, was I taking a step toward regret, perhaps toward despair? None of that. I shook myself, seated on the comfortless little chair, and vowed I would set my face to the light. I told myself the world is what we make it;

I resolved I would make the world right with me. I thought of my home in Covey—my real home after all. What had happened there? What was father doing at that moment? What was Norman doing? Norman! I thought of him as a blundering fellow. Why had he not asserted himself, and won me against my will? He could have done it, he could, he could! And then I should have flung away every misgiving, and loved him for a big, strong, masterful man. I meant that, meant it all, and meant more.

Now, why should I have thought such things? Still, why not? Sitting there with my hands clenched, I knew why I had run from Norman. He wished me without a struggle. He did not storm my heart. He did not fight. I had too much imagination for him. He was a humdrum sweetheart. He was a tedious wooer, and, of course, I was forced into rebellion.

I took the newspaper from behind the pillow and spread it out on the coverlet. I read down the two columns of my flight without feeling any emotion. I was in a spirit of indifference. Covey was remote. Father and Norman and Mrs. Clark were in the background in my thoughts. The great question was the present. I crumpled the paper in my hands and dropped it to the floor. What of to-morrow? How was I to eat, sleep and clothe myself? Prosaic questions, yet they had to be answered. I could not stop indefinitely in the hotel. I could not wear my country clothes for long. Already I had felt what it was to be at odds with Fashion.

Winnie came first in my thoughts. My heart glowed in a sense of real friendship, of real affection for her. I

liked her infinitely better than Camilla or Betty. There was something in Winnie that drew me close to her. I thought it would take little to make me love her—but she had gone from me! The thought struck me like a blow. She had left me in anger, and her anger was just. I had promised her I would not see Roy, and I had broken my promise. I was filled with uneasiness. I wanted Winnie's advice. I wanted her assistance. She had told me to "paddle my own canoe," and she had gone from Wesson's office. I could not find her. Unless she came back, I must go out in the world again in search of a friend.

I remembered all she had told me about Roy, and for one moment that night I heartily hated him. He had sent Winnie away—he had, he had done that. He had asked me to drink, and Winnie had warned me! She had warned me, too, I was not alone in Roy's thoughts, and there were Camilla and Betty! Betty had talked of being "thrown over"? Did she mean that for Roy's ears? Still, what if she did? I had "thrown over" Norman. Roy might have "thrown over" Betty for a similar reason.

I tried to arrange all the events of the day in order, but that was impossible. I tried to look at Roy as Winnie looked at him, but that too was impossible. I could not believe ill of him. He might be weak in some things, but I had a woman's fondness for weakness in men. A thousand Winnies might have raised their voices against Roy, and it would have been in vain. I clasped my hands over my heart, and I breathed his name. I clapped my hands and I shouted his name. Roy, Roy!—that was enough for me.

Away then with dismal thoughts and in content and confidence await the morrow! My first day had gone—flown away on speeding wings! There was to-morrow

and to-morrow and to-morrow—and I was free, free, free! And I turned out the light, and I pulled back the coverlet, and I stretched myself out—and no misty, startled faces appeared in the darkness over my bed!

CHAPTER XVI

IN the morning Camilla came. In response to a telephone call I went down to the hotel parlor to meet her. She glided toward me with perfect assurance, a majestic looking creature in her loftily poised head, her deliberately regulated carriage, and in the defiance bid to a homely world on the strength of her impassive, frigid beauty.

"Don't be alarmed, dear Frizzie," she said, as she extended an immaculately gloved hand. "Roy has told me all about you. Now, don't blame him. It was all in the papers, you know, and with your picture. I've just dropped in, as I told Roy I would, to keep you from getting lonely and to help you in any way I can."

"It's very kind of you, Camilla," I responded. "Roy did not tell me he had spoken to you."

"Oh, Roy never thought it necessary," she said. "You see Roy and Prince and Betty and I have been such good friends, really true friends I should say. So there was nothing in Roy's telling me about you, and, of course, if he hadn't I should have guessed it, anyway."

"And do Betty and Prince know?" I asked.

"I'm sure I can't tell you," she said, "but I should imagine they do. You see, I never asked them what Roy might have told them, but you may depend in any event Prince would put two and two together. Prince is an old-timer, and he doesn't say a great deal, but what he doesn't know isn't worth knowing."

"I'm afraid word will come to father yet, and he may find me," I said.

"No danger of that, dear Frizzie," she replied encouragingly. "Now let's sit here on this divan and tell me what you've been thinking of doing with yourself to-day. I don't mind saying, I've taken quite a fancy to you."

"I'm glad to hear that, Camilla," I said, as I seated myself beside her. She moved around until she was facing me squarely.

"Now I know you're going to be offended with me," she said, and more emphatically added, "I know it, I know it, but there's no need to. I may be sticking my finger into a hornet's nest, but I'm just going to run the risk, because I know what it is to be a greenhorn like you and with no one to advise you."

"Why, Camilla, I've not given you reason to think I'm a hornet's nest, have I?" I asked.

"Well, you never can tell," she replied. "Now here," she went on with more animation. "You intend to stop in New York; you intend to put the country behind you? You want to be a real New York girl. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, that's just it, Camilla," I replied.

"Then I'll tell you why I came here, if it's going to part us for ever," she said. She indicated her dress with her hands. "How would you like a dress like this?"

"Why, Camilla, I have never thought of anything like that," I said, shocked at her taking such liberty with me.

"If you haven't you're not human," she replied. "We may as well be frank with each other. I've had to swallow a lot of pride to come and talk to you like this, but I've done it because not so very long ago I was from the country myself."

"You have come from the country, too?" I asked in delight.

"I'm glad to say I am a country girl," she replied. "I'm from a spot on the map of New Jersey where a hundred trains shoot through every day and only two stop—one in the morning to take on commuters and the other in the evening to let them off. When I first came here I didn't have any one to tell me what to do, and I've often regretted it since. Now, why don't you put yourself in my hands? I know just how you feel. I'd bet anything you felt uncomfortable in the park restaurant last night. What girl wouldn't? I tell you, Frizzie, if you hope to go around with Roy you've got to do better than your country dressmaker. He's a millionaire you know, and men are awfully finicky about these things. My dear, they're twice as bad as women about them."

"I have \$200," I said. "Would that be enough, Camilla?"

She laughed scornfully. "Two hundred dollars! That'll give you a start all right, but in a year or two it'll about keep you in gloves. But I'd be a poor friend to you, Frizzie, if I stood by and saw you spend your last cent. I have a better plan than that. We'll put a few of the two hundred in a ready-made walking suit and a hat and a couple of other things, and then I'll take you uptown to Mme. Sylvie, my dressmaker, and she'll fit you out properly."

"Mme. Sylvie is a Frenchwoman?" I asked.

"She's French like the most of the modistes in New York," replied Camilla. "Her family name is O'Brien." We both laughed, but she quickly returned to the point at issue.

"Now, what do you say, Frizzie? You may trust me. I know Mme. Sylvie very intimately, and her terms are

very reasonable. A whole three months you will have to pay, and at the end of that time you can settle up the first bill and open up a second. Of course, if you just walked in there a stranger with no one to introduce you, she'd demand a big deposit and the balance on delivery; and just stick you horribly. I have a taxi waiting outside, and if you run up and pin on your hat we'll drive around to Dacy's and get the suit, then have a bite of lunch in the store, and then up to Mme. Sylvie's; and after that a ride in the park. How's that for a program?"

"It is truly splendid," I said; and in a few minutes we were in the taxicab, headed west for Broadway.

Dacy's got seventy-five of my dollars, part of it for a hat and other things, but as I left the store I thought the transformation that had been wrought in me was worth the price. Camilla advised me in everything; she hardly permitted me to express an opinion. She was right; she knew more than I, and I had only to survey myself in one of the tall mirrors to realize she had indeed proved a friend to me. I walked out of the store with my head held up with more confidence than I ever had felt before. Suddenly I thought it was the duty of the world to look at me, and I was more than willing to put myself on show. *All is vanity*, said the preacher, but little the preacher knows of vanity in his black coat!

Mme. Sylvie received me as if I were a daughter. "I was just going out to lunch when I got your telephone from the store, Miss Delmont," she said to my companion. "And this is your friend, Miss—Miss Peabody. Well, Miss Peabody, I'll be very glad to do anything for you I possibly can. I like to help the girls out, especially when they're good looking like you are. Don't take that for flattery now—I never flatter nobody. I'm a business

woman, and it's all business with me. I just can't help that, now can I, Miss Delmont."

"I don't think you can, Sylvie," said Camilla.

"Well now, let's see what we can do in the way of dressing you up, Miss Peabody. There won't be much trouble in doing it. You'd look stunning in any old thing. My, what a picture you would make in the Greek. If I could be made over again I'd be just like you, that's all I'd ask. There are few girls that come to me that are the likes of you and Miss Delmont, if I do say it before you. How's the show doing, Miss Delmont? They haven't begun to hand out 'paper' yet, have they?"

"I don't think so, Sylvie," answered Camilla, "but when they do you shall hear from me."

"That's too good of you, Miss Delmont. The girls generally look out for me, and I just dearly love to see them on the stage. They're so different from what they are when they're walking around. You wouldn't think sometimes they're the same girls. . . . Don't think I'm wasting my time, Miss Peabody. I'm just taking you in, and thinking what would be the best I can do for you. Naturally, the very first thing you want is something for evening, and a change with it. That's my advice to every girl that comes to me when she first lands in New York. 'Nobody will bother you during the day,' I says, 'and at the worst you can stay in bed, but in the evening you've got to show yourself, and the better you look all the better it will be for you.' If I might suggest, Miss Peabody, I'd turn you out an opera coat and swell *décolletée*. That will start you off nice and modish, my dear."

"Why, that was what Camilla advised me to get," I said.

"See that, Miss Peabody," laughed Mme. Sylvie. "Two

heads are better than one. I'd trust Miss Delmont's judgment any time of the day or night, and I'm right happy to think she agrees with me."

"Somebody must have wound you up, the way you're talking, Sylvie," said Camilla.

"Oh, dear no," responded Mme. Sylvie, "I'm always wound up, Miss Delmont, only don't you go and tell anybody that. Now if you'll just step over this side, Miss Peabody I'll show you my samples. I don't keep much of a stock on hand, and nothing goes to waste. I've accounts in all the big, first-class stores, you know, and it's lots easier and cheaper to order goods up just as I want it."

When Mme. Sylvie was running a tape measure over me she engaged in lively conversation with Camilla. "You know that Gale girl you introduced me to, Miss Delmont, the one that married the Wall Street broker? Well, she went on the honeymoon to Europe owing me four hundred and sixty-seven dollars, and that's what I call downright mean and a shame. She was such a fright, too! If I hadn't taken the trouble to smooth out all the angles and curves and make her look like something, she'd never have married higher in the social scale than a painter. Doing it on my money, too!"

"I'm sure she will pay you when she returns, Sylvie," said Camilla.

"I know she'll pay me," replied Mme. Sylvie. "She told one of the girls she was coming back in the *Campania*, and I'm watching the steamship lists. The day she lands I'll catch her on the telephone and if she doesn't settle up I'll telephone her dear of a husband, that's what I'll do."

"You wouldn't do that surely, Sylvie," protested Camilla.

"Indeed, and I would," returned Mme. Sylvie with great positiveness. "It wouldn't be the first time, neither. If the girls want me to keep on helping them to half-decent figgers for next to nothing they'd better not get married. The way I look at it is this: When I give a girl the shape to land a rich husband I ought to be good and well paid for it."

"Sylvie, you remember that tan broadcloth I got a year ago?" asked Camilla.

"Nothing goes out of here that I forget, Miss Delmont."

"Well, I sold it, Sylvie—got \$10 and a green parasol for it."

"I know," said Mme. Sylvie. "You sold it to Miss De Vere, whose real name is McCarthy, and you've got the green parasol and you haven't got the \$10."

"Why, Sylvie, how do you know?" asked Camilla.

"Well, I guess I should know something about it," replied Mme. Sylvie. "If you want to look at the dress I'll show it to you made-over. It fits her like the paper on the wall, and she's going to wear it in the sextette, if the stage manager only will let her."

"I'll talk to the stage manager, and see that he doesn't," said Camilla. "I'll have more than a green parasol."

I spoke to Mme. Sylvie about payment for her work. "It will be time enough to talk of that, Miss Peabody, when we see how the things turn out," she said. "I'm in no hurry, anyway. You simply can't do that in the dress-making business, now can you, Miss Delmont? And if you tried dunning people you'd be without a customer in a week. Would you believe it, I've women—rich women, too—owing me for dresses these six years back. That's what makes us get a name for charging high prices—the women who settle on the minute have to pay for the

women who hang on, and never pay only when they can't help it."

I was not satisfied, but she talked so fast I could not raise the subject again. I felt uncomfortable when I came away. I passed few words with Camilla on the drive back to the hotel. I did not like the actions of Mme. Sylvie. She was too friendly; she seemed too free with her credit. Why should she be willing to trust me? Why should she be insistent almost I should place myself in her debt? I was inclined to suspect Camilla had something to do with it. Camilla had telephoned to Mme. Sylvie. I could not understand that. I could not understand anything about the whole strange affair. I held suspicion, and I determined to wait developments with my eyes open.

CHAPTER XVII

I ENTERED the hotel to meet Prince Andrews on his way out. He had roses in his hand, the flowers showing in a soft red through a covering of flimsy paper. He bowed graciously, and held out the roses.

"I hope you won't think I am intruding, Miss Peabody," he said in meek politeness, "and please accept this little token of esteem for so charming a young lady as yourself."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Andrews," I said, accepting the flowers, and feeling more than a little flattered.

"It is a great pleasure to me indeed to have you receive them," he said. "I hardly dared to venture here, Miss Peabody, but I almost felt it my duty to come. I know how trying are the first days for anybody in a cruel city like this, and I hope this is not the last we shall see of each other."

"Oh no, I hope not, Mr. Andrews," I said, "and I thank you for the roses very, very much. I shall wear one of them to dinner with Roy."

The faintest sign of alarm showed in his face, but was gone in an instant. "I must beg you not to do that, Miss Peabody, it would hardly be what you might call fair to me, you know. Although really I shouldn't object—Roy and I have been such good friends. You may wear it if you wish, only I must ask you to refrain from telling Roy you got it from me. You will grant me that little favor, if only for the reason to preserve this charming incident

of the flowers between ourselves? Perhaps, if you knew the value I attach to flowers, Miss Peabody, you would realize fully just what I mean by my otherwise rather odd request. Every flower tells a different story to me."

"I love all flowers the same," I said, "and of course I shall do as you wish, Mr. Andrews. I have decided now I will not wear one of them. Instead of that I will keep them all in my room."

"I only wish I were deserving of the compliment you pay me," he said with another bow. "And Roy, the young rascal, is to take you to dinner?"

"Why do you call Roy a 'young rascal,' Mr. Andrews?" I asked.

"Ah, Miss Peabody, it is easy to see you are not accustomed to the terms of speech with which I reveal the esteem in which I hold my friends. 'Young rascal'! Interpreted, that is to say: Roy is a splendid young fellow, chivalrous, brave and witty, a favorite with men and, I may add, a favorite with women. Now with that," he added, smilingly, "I shall be off."

"Why not wait until Roy comes?" I said. "He spoke of an automobile ride before dinner, and you might accompany us."

"I cannot let myself think of the pleasure it would be," he replied, and I thought there was evasion in his tone. "I must plead the old excuse of a previous engagement. The fact is, Miss Peabody, Betty and I are going to Martin's, and I also promised to take her for a little spin. So, you see, I have no time to lose. I'm sure the promise of friendship implied in these flowers will keep all, even the fact of my informal call, a secret between us."

I held out my hand. "I'm sure it will, Mr. Andrews," I replied with much spirit, and I laughed as I watched him go along the corridor to the street. I thought of all

he had said, of all I reasoned he had left unsaid; and I told Roy. He arrived before Andrews had been gone ten minutes, and I carried one of the roses pinned near my throat.

"Do you see this rose, Roy?" I asked.

"It's very pretty," he said flatly.

"Mr. Andrews gave it to me. How did he know I was stopping here, Roy?"

"Andrews gave you that!" he exclaimed. "Camilla or Betty must have told him. I warned them against it, but you can't trust girls like that. I had to tell Betty where you were to keep her from putting the reporters on your track. If she had told them I knew you, they wouldn't want anything more. That would be a choice morsel of news for them. They'd leap at the conclusion we'd eloped. They'd have us married. I had to bribe her to keep her mouth shut—she was mad in the park last night for some reason or other—and now she's gone and told Andrews. You see how risky it all is?"

"I see, Roy," I replied.

"I never thought Andrews would do a thing like that. He did it because he thinks he has us in his power. But he wouldn't dare give us away. If he did it would be the last of him with me and a lot others besides. But why didn't you throw the roses in his face, Frizzie?"

"Was it wrong to take them?" I asked.

"It wasn't exactly wrong, but it might give Andrews a chance to laugh at me. You don't wish that, do you, Frizzie?"

"Never, Roy," I answered earnestly. "I will send the roses back."

"No, keep them," advised Roy. "Only refuse others he may offer you."

"You are disappointed in me, Roy," I said. "But I

will do as you wish, in this and whatever else you may tell me."

"You will, Frizzie?" he rejoined quickly, and with an emphasis that thrilled me.

"Yes, Roy," I said, fluttering in excitement, as I realized he had read deep meaning into my words. Well, perhaps he was right. My heart beat fast; my cheeks grew heated. I was confused, and turned partly away from him. I felt his hand on my shoulder, and powerless to resist I moved slowly under his guidance until we were face to face.

"You meant that, Frizzie, every word?" questioned Roy. "Tell me that you meant it, from the bottom of your heart?"

I hung my head, but quickly raised it. "Yes, Roy, I meant it," I said. "And you, Roy, what about you?" I entreated, almost overpowered by the rush of tender feeling for him.

"You bet, I mean it more than you do, Frizzie," he replied; and that was all that was spoken between us then. But it was enough for me. Whatever Winnie might say to the contrary, Roy merited my faith and held it.

CHAPTER XVIII

WE crossed the Fort Lee ferry into New Jersey, and Roy let his car run easily northward along the Palisades. I admired in silence the broad sweep of the Hudson, keeping us company on the right; for Roy was wrapt almost gloomily in his thoughts. At length he took his eyes off the dusty streak of road ahead, and turned to me.

"There's something I should have told you long ago, Frizzie, only for the upset you gave me with that news about Andrews."

"Tell me now, Roy," I urged.

He slowed down the car until it barely moved. "Norman Clark was in to see me this afternoon," he said.

"Norman!" I exclaimed. "He knows? He suspects you, Roy?"

"No, he doesn't. He suspects nobody. He's got it pretty straight, I guess. He's satisfied you ran away, Frizzie, because you couldn't bear the thought of a loveless marriage."

"That is the truth, the whole truth, Roy," I assured him.

"Only the whole truth on your side, Frizzie," said Roy, and bent toward me. I saw that every bit of color had gone from his cheeks, and that his eyes were very grave. "There's one thing I want to say to you now, Frizzie: Norman Clark loves you; and Norman's love is a good thing for any woman to have."

I looked at him in amazement. "Why do you speak like that when it is too late?" I demanded.

"Why do I?" took up Roy, almost regretfully. "Well, between you and me, Frizzie, I can't take any pride just at present in what I did to Norman; I can't say to myself I treated him exactly on the square. He made me think of that side of it to-day; and, whatever else Norman Clark may be, he's true as steel."

"But you are, too, Roy," I added.

"Oh, yes; I suppose I am; I'm glad you think so, anyway, Frizzie. But somehow I've had it impressed on me it was a rather shabby trick to advise an old class-mate's fiancée to run away on her wedding day."

"I ran away of my own free will, Roy," I hastened, in my impulsive way.

Roy brought his face still nearer, and I could not mistake his earnestness. "Look here, Frizzie," he said. "Do you wish to go back? Norman's not half a bad sort. He's big and whole-hearted and brave. He'll make you a good husband. Tell me you want to go, and I'll take you straight to the train. You will be happy with Norman, I know."

"Happy!" I repeated bitterly. "That's just what father and Mrs. Clark kept telling me, and it is what you tell me! What about me, Roy? Is Norman's love sufficient for us both? I'll never go back, Roy; I'll never go back. Don't you understand?"

Roy reached over his right hand and grasped mine firmly. "That settles it, little girl," he said, all his gravity gone. "It would have struck me hard to let you go back out of reach, but I felt it was only honorable to put the case before you frankly."

"I am very glad you did, Roy, for now we both understand, don't we?"

He laughed lightly. "You bet we do, Frizzie; you bet we do." He quickened the pace until the wind smoothed back my hair at my temples. "Feeling good once more, I am," said Roy breezily. "Norman first and then Andrews had me right on edge. But don't you wish to hear more about Norman's visit?"

"Certainly, Roy; I was on the point of asking you."

Roy leaned back, with only one hand on the steering wheel. "Well, the newspapers said he was taking your desertion philosophically and staying at home, but they were wrong, as they usually are. This morning I got a wire from my private sleuth that Norman had bought a ticket up to the city and had taken the ten o'clock train out of Covey. That didn't impress me much, for hunting a person's trail in New York is the hardest kind of prospecting. I can't tell you how surprised I was, though, when Norman walked into my office. My first thought was that he knew everything, but luckily I had enough sense to keep my mouth shut. And in a minute he had made it clear he knew nothing at all."

"Oh, that's good, Roy," I cried, in great relief.

"I don't know whether it is or not," went on Roy. "Poor fellow, he was deep in the dumps. And he came to me because he wanted somebody to confide in. Think of that, Frizzie!"

For the first time, I felt serious. Also a wave of sympathy swept over me. After all, it was something for me to possess Norman Clark's love. And I had repaid him shamefully. I had sinned against him terribly, wilfully. I had been utterly selfish, giving not a single thought to him; instead, holding him up to ridicule, making him the butt of scornful laughter and vulgar jest. I felt a lump grow in my throat; I was stricken with sadness and re-

morse. Tears rose in my eyes; I looked at Roy as through a mist.

"Roy, Roy, what shall I do?" I implored.

"You're not going back on me now, are you?" he asked.

"No, no, Roy; but Norman—I did not realize before what I had done to him."

He reassured me with the pressure of his fingers on my arm. "That's all right, Frizzie. Don't worry. Isn't it better to have it over and done with at once, than to be married and having to face a lifetime of it?"

Roy's was the practical viewpoint. I saw that instantly. Of course, I was only too anxious to accept his reasoning, but wasn't it true? I dropped sadness, forgot remorse.

"Go on, Roy, please tell me more?" I requested, quite myself again.

Roy glanced at me admiringly. "You've got a sensible little head on your pretty shoulders, Frizzie," he laughed.

"Don't tease me, Roy," I rebuked him, but not in ungratified tone.

"All right, I won't, Frizzie. And here goes for the rest of it: Norman had a wild notion he might find you in New York, and that then he might persuade you to marry him here. It wasn't such a bad idea of getting married in the city; only Norman did not realize until he was on the train the hopelessness of ever persuading you, even if he found you. He just came on up because he could not endure the inactive torture in Covey. He had to do something, and he took the train when he was returning from an interview with your father."

"Did he tell you anything about father?" I inquired anxiously.

"Yes, a lot. And the more he told me the more I grew

in admiration for that estimable man. I fancy your father is so strong it gives him points of weakness. He won't search for you. He's all broken up, but the world won't see it. He fell on Norman's neck—the first time, Mother Ann told Norman, he had given way since your mother died. He sobbed and even cried."

"I can't believe that, Roy," I protested. "I can't believe father doing anything like that."

"I guess it was as much of a surprise to Norman as it would be to yourself, Frizzie," continued Roy, unmindful of my doubting words. "But his breakdown was only for a minute or two. He soon recovered himself. And he sat down with Norman and talked it over. He said that as you had gone of your own free will, he would leave the future to your own free will also. He showed that he knew you thoroughly, Frizzie. I guess he knew it were far better to leave the issue in your own hands. He was convinced that to follow you, to find you and plead with you, threaten or attempt to use force, would only serve to add to the difficulty. He advised Norman to wait—after Norman had assured him he never would love another. He said to wait, and that one day you would come home; and that you would come home bearing aloft your shield, and not carried on it. Your father's faith in you is wonderful, Frizzie."

"He still expects me to marry Norman," I reflected, half to myself. "He won't forsake that; he won't yield."

"He will yield no more than his daughter," said Roy.

"You favor him?" I cried almost angrily. "Well, you're both mistaken. I'll never go back; and even if I did, Norman would go on waiting."

"I am absolutely impartial, Frizzie," rejoined Roy, and thereby did nothing to allay my uneasiness.

"What else did Norman tell you?" I asked abruptly.

"Oh, as soon as your flight was discovered, all your relatives and the others hurried away; showing their tact and good sense in that. The church was stripped by your father's order, and the flowers sent to the hospital in Southampton. Mrs. Clark went off to bed with a splitting headache, and was still there when Norman left. Mr. Clark wandered in and around the house; whenever he met Norman, patting him on the shoulder and telling him to bear up like a man."

"That's so like him," I said.

"Guess Mr. Clark is your one real sympathizer, Frizzie. He told Norman to try and think how hard it must have been on you."

"The dear, old man!" I exclaimed, and felt comforted.

"That's about all," added Roy. "It looks now as if you are safe. Norman was going back on the first train. As soon as he had shaken my hand and left the office, I wired to that private detective to come in off the job. Norman made me feel ashamed for ever having sent the detective to Covey."

"You did it with a good purpose in view, though, Roy?"

"Yes, I suppose I did," he replied, half-heartedly; then suddenly gave attention to the car, and swung it sharply in between neatly clipped hedges. "Let's forget it, Frizzie; you've done your part, and I've done mine. Covey's behind you at last, and let it stay there." He laughed merrily. "Yes, and here we both are with a good dinner before us. You can't beat this roadhouse all the way up both sides of the river to Albany. Wow, but I'm hungry! How is it with you, Frizzie?"

"As with you, Roy," I replied; but somehow, much as Roy desired, I did not prove my words.

For Norman would not be dismissed, as I sat with

Roy at the snow-white table; and neither would father. Father in tears over me? It was more than I could comprehend; and my spirits weighed until Roy and I were speeding homeward under the blue light of the full moon.

CHAPTER XIX

SEVERAL days went past. In the mornings I roamed the city finding new wonders at every turn; and gradually beginning to realize the vastness and complexity of it all. I spent the afternoons and evenings in the company of Roy; always riding in his automobile far out of the city, dining on a cool veranda, and then returning slowly to my hotel.

I was starting out alone in the early afternoon of the fourth day, and had just turned from the hotel desk, when I saw Betty come prancing in from the street. Betty was as breezy as a March day, and at times she was as bright as a day in June. She was both breezy and bright that day, although I thought her brightness was a little forced. She took me by the hand and shook vigorously.

"Hello, Frizzie; delighted to see you," she rattled off. "I was just romping past, and thought I'd drop in to see you. Say, you're all dressed up, aren't you? New tailor-made, eh? Well, it does suit you, I must say. I congratulate you. You're as spick and span as a yacht. Oh, but you are the sly one. Bet you never told Roy yet that Prince brought those flowers. I don't blame you, wouldn't do it myself; only you are beginning early to play them off against each other like that! Say, it's a wonder you wouldn't tell a girl about these things. If I hadn't seen Prince coming out of here I'd never have guessed it or dreamed it myself in the living world. But

I buttonholed him, I did, and he had to come out with it. But don't you worry, dear; it's safe with me. I may babble away to you, but Roy will never hear a word from me. And don't you tell Roy I know—what Roy doesn't know won't hurt him; and I'll tell you I admire you, for the girl who doesn't watch out for her p's and q's here in New York is going to get left. Take that from me, and keep at it just as you're going and you'll wear diamonds." She stepped back and appeared to survey me with pleasure. "My, how stunning you do look!" she exclaimed. "If I had your shape, Frizzie, I wouldn't take back talk from the best of them. But say, now that I get a good look at it, that isn't a tailor-made. That's a ready-made, isn't it? 'Pon my word I never should have known it, had I not stood off and looked it over carefully."

"How do you know it is a ready-made, Betty?" I asked.

"Oh, my dear, how does any woman know? Why, honest, all half of the women in New York does is sizing up every woman that comes along and figuring what department store she buys her ready-mades in." She came closer again. "Now, tell me this: Are we going to be friends, or not? I'll admit I was a bit too hasty the other evening, but I'm all over it; and Roy can go his way and I'll go mine. I'll never be a rival of yours, my dear. I'm not so foolish as to think I've got half a chance, because the new faces always are the winners."

"We cannot be rivals," I said.

"We could be rivals if I was willing to sit in the game," she replied.

"You may be interested in Roy, but I have no interest in him, Betty," I said; and I was surprised at the ease with which the words came from me.

"Well, I do hope you don't ask me to believe that?" she responded, with the air of a skeptic. "What are you here for, if it isn't for Roy?"

The words stung me, and without attempting to conceal my anger I replied hotly: "You must understand, Betty, I am here of my own free will. If you cannot understand, I won't explain further; and I will not hear another word from you."

She laughed scornfully, but evidently with a desire to placate me. "Well, I must confess you are fiery, although you do look so gentle and harmless," she said. "It's all right, Frizzie. You're well able to look out for number one. I only wish I could bristle up and show my teeth like that. But I didn't come here looking for a fight. I just ran in for a friendly call; and now that I see you in that thing I've been thinking you might want a real tailor-made."

"Thank you for your interest," I said coldly.

"You needn't get grumpy now, Frizzie," she asserted. "Instead of looking as if you were going to snap my head off, you ought to feel thankful to a girl for offering to set you right. If we girls didn't hold out a helping hand to girls like you that have just blown into town, how would you ever find out things? If you had a mother or a brother or a sister it wouldn't be my place to open my mouth, but when you haven't a soul, why you might at least give a girl credit for good intentions."

"I give you credit for the best of intentions, Betty," I replied; and in a humor to hear more from her I drew her to a seat and requested her to enlighten me further.

"Well, I'm sure it's none of my business," she said, "only I do hate to see a girl like you taking the chance of being left to live and die a hermit. New York hasn't any use for a girl unless she's got half-way decent clothes;

and it's only when a girl's satisfied with the clothes she's got that she's got any peace of mind. Another week or two and you'll be getting restless. Clothes grow in a girl's eye. To me, clothes are a sight bigger problem than man, taking him as you like—sweetheart or husband, or somebody else's husband. That's me, Frizzie. You'd think to hear me talk I'm practical, but when it comes down to doing what I ought to do I'm a bigger fool than you could be if you tried. I try not to be romantic and all that, and I suppose I'm not; but I'll swear I've got no head for business. All I know is that we can't wear shoddy here in New York—we've got to have it all wool and a yard wide or we're left to nurse our toes out in the cold. If you want to have me help you into a decent dress or two then all right, if you don't want me to, then that'll be all right just the same. Here, I'll make you a proposition: Come around with me to Zimpel's and I'll get him to give you time on a tailor-made."

"No, thank you, Betty," I said.

"I won't take that for an answer," she replied. "Here, I'll tell you what we'll do, and what's put it in my mind: I'm going around to Zimpel's to fit on a gown myself, and we'll walk around there. It's only a couple of blocks. You're just going out, aren't you?"

I looked her straight in the eyes, and I never flinched. "You're mistaken, Betty," I said, "I'm just returning. I've walked blocks and blocks; oh, miles and miles!"

"You don't want to do it, I can see that," she retorted. "Just as you say, only never complain I didn't offer to do the right thing by you. I'll drop in again in a day or two."

She tripped out as breezily as she had entered. I saw

her swing to the right toward Broadway. I waited five minutes. Then I stepped cautiously into the street. Betty had disappeared, and I turned to the left toward Fifth Avenue.

CHAPTER XX

I HAD promised Roy I should walk north in Fifth Avenue, and he picked me up near Forty-second Street. We continued northward to Fifty-ninth street, where we took to Central Park and pursued a diagonal course to Seventh Avenue, up which we sped to the Bronx, and on through to the open country in Westchester County. It was a couple of hours later when we drew up at a little inn, where we found seats at a table on a veranda, affording a view of Long Island Sound, lying smooth and bright as glass.

Roy was in a communicative mood, and before we left that table he had told me much family history and a great deal about himself. He had great ambitions. "I'm going to be as big a success as dad, only in a different way," he asserted gaily; and proceeded to relate what a conquering man his father was.

"Dad began on a shoestring," said Roy, proudly, "and now look what he is! He's one of the half-dozen biggest men in the Street. You can't know what that means, Frizzie, and I'm not boasting in trying to give you an idea of dad's power. He's president of six companies and director in seventy-three. He's got a genius for making money; he's a kind of money-making machine. He's gone along without trouble all his life, excepting the time when Nance married that Italian count. You didn't know there was a real, live count in the family? Well, I'll tell you about it:

"You see, dad never cared much for those foreigners—he said they were too easy in a business deal. He wanted Nance to marry an American. When the count first called he told him to begone for a whipper-snapper, fortune-chasing imitation of a man, but the count didn't object. Every morning for a month he walked up Fifth Avenue with a bouquet, with ribbons streaming from it, in his hand, and always on the stroke of eleven o'clock he gave a ten-cent tip to the man at the door and requested him to present the flowers to Nance with his compliments. Dad let the count make a public exhibition of himself, because he thought it would cure Nance. But the count knew what women like better than dad did, and when it came to the final tussle dad found he had to fight not only Nance but mother as well. The wine of Italy had gone to Nance's head, and mother was just as tipsy. Dad promised me half a million if I could work one of my college chums into Nance's good graces. I tried seven or eight of them, but Nance shied on them all. Then dad said his own daughter wouldn't sell him out, and that if she didn't throw over the count he would disinherit her. But that didn't frighten Nance for a minute, and mother told dad she was ashamed to hear him talk like that of any child of his. 'Doesn't it mean anything to you to be an American?' asked dad, and Nance replied: 'I'll be a better American in Italy than I am here, father.' 'Do you hear that, Mary?' said dad to mother, 'She'll be a better American when she's a Dago!' All mother did was to rebuke dad for calling the count a Dago, and to remind dad that he had to let Nance follow the dictates of her own heart.

"Well, they were married, and father came out in the papers and said the count was a splendid fellow and that he favored him from the start. Nance and her count

went to Palm Beach on a honeymoon. They reached Naples just six weeks after the wedding, and the following day the papers printed long accounts of creditors besieging the doors of the count's Roman palace. Reporters came to dad, and he told them he wouldn't give a fig for a man who couldn't run into debt. No one ever could read dad. When he was talking to the reporters he had four cables from the count on his desk requesting a remittance of a few tens of thousands. The last of the four was signed by the count and Nance; and dad raved around the office, taking his grudge out on the staff. Mother asserted herself and the money was sent; and dad's still sending. Nobody can stand against dad, except in his own home."

"That's all very interesting, Roy," I said.

"Oh, but that's not the best I've got about father," he replied. "Wait till I tell you how we 'broke into society.' Mother had her heart set on cutting a swath in society, but for years dad stood out against it. Mother used to say, 'What have we got all our money for?' and dad used to reply, 'To make more money with.' It looked as if mother never would gain her ambition—you see with Nance married to the count she would not be content with anybody but a swell of the 400 for May, my younger sister—until one evening dad came home and said it would be all right; that he wished the whole family to mix in the cream of the social swim, and that he was going to see to it that we did. Mother was in transports, and it all came out as dad promised. Mother goes to all the so-called exclusive affairs now, but she doesn't know why the invitations come piling in on her. Dad could tell her something, as he's told me. This is what dad told me, one night when we were alone after dinner:

"'Roy, my boy, I hope you'll never get this society

bee buzzing in your bonnet. You see what it's done for us. It's brought an English butler into the house, and a French chef and a French maid, until I'm afraid to talk to my own servants. You couldn't guess how it all came about. Your mother thinks I did it as a favor to her, but she doesn't know the truth of it. You see, whatever you may say about these near-men of the 400, they've got money. That's the best part of them, and it's what makes them the snobs they are. I used to go down to the Waldorf at night, and those fellows made it plain I wasn't good enough for them. When they got talking about pedigrees and family trees I wasn't in it, although I've been told some of their boasted ancestors started skinning skunks. Well, you know, I have a fair show of money myself, and I thought that ought to have made us equals. But no, sir; there was more to it than that, so I said to myself, "Wesson, you'll have to teach these fine boys a lesson." And I did, by gad, I did. I sat back quietly until I got a few of them where I wanted them. They may know all about ball-room dancing, but they don't know all the fancy steps in the Wall Street dance; and I nipped a few of them; I got them with their backs to the wall, and you ought to have heard them squeal. You'd think I'd stuck a knife in them, and, by gad, so I had, and turned it round in them. They were all quitters, and they came to me crying, "Mercy, mercy, Wesson, for heaven's sake, mercy!" "I'll have mercy," I said, and I started to play football. I banged the desk with my fist under their noses, and made every one of the lady-fingers jump three feet into the air. "See here, you lot of muffins," I said, "I'm not in this deal specially for the money that's in it. I've got money enough to take a wagonful of it down to the Battery and shovel it into the bay, but I could get along with some more of it

if you don't do what I want you to do." "Tell us, tell us, what you want us to do and we'll do it, Mr. Wesson," they all squeaked in chorus, and I knew I had them. "I guess I've got you fellows pretty well pinched," I said, "the shoe's hurting some, isn't it?" "Oh, Lord, if you don't let up we'll lose millions," whined one of them, and I laid the law down right that minute. "Now here, you small fry," I said, "you've been holding your noses too almighty high to suit me. When I wander down to the Waldorf and ramble around in general after this, I don't want the temperature to fall below zero every time you happen to be sitting sipping your champagne-punches. I'm not so particular about myself either that I can't stand for it, but I've got a kind of pride in my family; and if things are not set right in that direction I'll show you no more mercy than I would a rattlesnake." Man, Roy, you ought to seen them running in out of the wet. They were falling over each other, but I only let them come in gradually and one at a time. Whatever further talking was done was all on my side, and I sent them away whipped and with their tails between their legs. I didn't give them a chance to turn round and bite me, either. I held the screws tight for a few days till your mother had walked in through Society's pearly gates and all the papers knew about it. I knew that once inside it'd take more than an earthquake to put her out again, so I let the kid-gloved Captains of Finance come to me for settlement. They were smiling, but they looked as if they were tired of sitting on the pins and needles. I gathered in a sheaf of certified checks, giving me more than five cents for my time and trouble; and when all was ready for the Grand Hand-shaking, I fired the bomb under them. "You're a nice lot of shrimps," I said, flicking the ash off my cigar in that indifferent way that means

so much. "It wasn't that I cared a red cent for my family getting inside the breastworks of your pink and purple playground, but just that I wanted to save my own skin from the fangs you wear; and I've saved it and my family's inside the breastworks without having to buy its way in. You ought to know by this time you can't play ping-pong and be like your fathers were when they made the money for me to take away from you. You fellows ought to hire a gang of assassins to keep you from crossing south of Forty-second Street; where business is carried on there you don't belong. Not one of you has ever guessed that I bit off more than I could chew when I stacked up against your game. That's what I did, but I out-gamed you. I was left with only a straw in my hand, but I roared and threatened and told you it was a sledge-hammer and you saw it that way. I dragged in that Society piffle to get time to catch my second wind, and I got my second wind; and now I've got your certified checks, and you can all skedaddle out of here. That's all, and if ever I hear of any backbiting from you I'll put on the brakes again; and I've got two dollars where I had one before. Good-by." "

Roy stopped for a minute to dwell in satisfaction on his father's achievement, and I remained silent trying to reason it all out. "That's only one of father's many victories," said Roy at length, "and the funny part of it was there was no attempt at reprisal. Instead of that several came to father with money for investment; and father told me he had expected that and always had it in view. He's often told me the only way to make Wall Street love you is with a whip."

"Your father is a great man, Roy," I said.

"Yes," replied Roy, "and I hope to be still greater, but not in the way he thinks. I've never had much heart

for buying and selling stocks ; it seems so sordid to me. If I saw only a stock-ticker ahead of me we wouldn't be sitting here, Frizzie, for I never should have known what you meant that day on the knoll, overlooking the Atlantic."

"That's true, Roy," I exclaimed, glowing in enthusiasm.

"Father never thinks of anything but business, and he wants me to do the same," said Roy. "Only this morning he asked me when was I going to get through having my fling and buckle down to work."

"What do you mean by having your 'fling,' Roy?" I asked in my guileless way.

"You don't know!" laughed Roy. "Well, it would be hard for me to explain to you just what it means, but perhaps I might say it is having fun while you are young, before the responsibilities of life pile on your shoulders."

"Then we're having a 'fling' now—dining here?" I asked.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," replied Roy. "The term doesn't apply so much to you as to me—to young men, you know. It's just going around in a harmless way having a lively time, taking a drink or two, and——"

"Roy," I interrupted impulsively, "you've had cocktails the last three times we've had dinner together."

He laughed good-naturedly and without sign of the seriousness I felt. "How many persons have you seen without a glass before them, Frizzie?" he asked.

"Not one, except myself," I replied truthfully.

"Everybody drinks in New York," said Roy. "Some women drink as much as men, some women drink more. We're getting quite Continental here in New York."

"I don't like it, Roy," I said.

"Neither do I, but I don't worry over it," he replied. "Every generation has its own brand of morals, and it happens our generation in New York approves of drink-

ing so long as we do not drink ourselves under the table. Life isn't worth living for a Prohibitionist in New York."

"It's a dreadful state of affairs," I said.

"I suppose it is," replied Roy. "Our restaurant keepers are very clever. They provide palms and cut flowers and embossed menu cards and gilded ceilings and red lights and string orchestras—and then they carry the bar-room to the restaurant tables in crystal glasses. Little wonder women are drinking and smoking."

"They're not smoking surely, Roy?" I said in horror.

"Well, they don't go around and smoke promiscuously," he said, "but you can imagine the situation when mother, who's so proud of her Puritan descent, has come to serving cigarettes to her women guests. She doesn't smoke, of course, but she simply has to provide cigarettes or become the subject of unfriendly gossip. And that's not the only principle she'd had to sacrifice for her position in society."

"I will never smoke nor drink, Roy," I said earnestly.

"I know you won't," laughed Roy. "That's one reason why I admire you. We men don't care especially for women who drink and smoke; we never will be Continentals in that respect. Still I'm not a pessimist—we're not headed straight for perdition. We'll get over our weakness for wine and tobacco. Some day—who knows?—we may elect a Prohibitionist president."

"I hope you mean that, Roy."

"I mean it," he said. "I can be serious occasionally. Father often says that if I were poor I would make a temperance lecturer or a revivalist." He threw back his head and laughed heartily, then suddenly picked up by its slender stem the glass that stood before him. "But come, Frizzie," he said, in an altered tone. "Let us laugh and be merry—I will empty my glass!"

"Don't, Roy," I said, and I put my hand firmly on his wrist.

"If it was anybody else but you, Frizzie, I would drink it," he said in a softened voice, and put the glass back on the table. "Why not drink it if I want it!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I'm not afraid of it."

I tried to restrain him, but he caught the glass and drained it to the last drop. Then he raised his hand and with an impassioned sweep shattered the glass into fragments on the floor at his side. There were cries of astonishment from persons at adjoining tables, but Roy had no ears for them. He shoved back his chair and got to his feet.

"I swear to you, Frizzie," he said, "that's the last time I'll ever taste liquor."

"You are in earnest, Roy?" I asked, thrilled in excitement.

"I swear it," he replied. "If I'm weak it's father's fault. He gave me the taste—from the bottom of his glass—but I'll overcome this weakness. Come, Frizzie, we'll go; we've been long enough in this place. From this time on I'll be as strong as you are."

There was not a sound as we walked through the rows of tables, but I felt all eyes were upon us.

"I swear, Frizzie, I swear," said Roy. "Mother often wanted me to swear, but it's taken you to make me do it."

We went out through a door, leaving the lights and the music behind; and joy was in my heart. From the diners came an outburst of ironical laughter, but my faith was proof against that.

CHAPTER XXI

It was two days later when Camilla called again, and I took her up to my room. She seated herself carefully on the edge of the miniature chair, held herself erect, and looked around.

"What a quaint little room this is, Frizzie," she said, with a placid smile. "I never could get to like the life in hotels, though—they're so matter-of-fact, cold and icy. If I were you, I should be on the lookout for a snug, little flat of my own."

"I'm afraid, Camilla," I responded, "I shall have to be satisfied with this room until I find some employment."

"You're not thinking of working, are you?" she asked, as if shocked. "Only scrubwomen and cash girls and telephone girls and stenographers, and such as those, work! Who ever put that in your head, Frizzie? I'd never think of working!"

"I'm sure I must think of it," I replied, "because I never will return to Covey."

"There's lots of work for you, only I shouldn't call it by that name," said Camilla. "Why don't you try your luck in the chorus of some show or other? I've done pretty well at it, and it's come in handy for Betty. I bet the first manager that sees you will fall over himself to engage you. Eighteen dollars a week are not to be sniffed at, especially with girls like us thrown out into the world."

"And are you in the chorus, Camilla?" I asked.

"Not much," she replied tartly, with a deprecating

shrug of her shoulders. "I've been a show girl for six months. That's the next thing to a speaking part, and we get twenty dollars a week, which proves how little the managers know their business. If it wasn't for the show girls, musical comedy wouldn't stand as much chance in Broadway as a Teddy Kremer melodrama."

"And if I entered the chorus, what should I be required to do, Camilla?"

"Oh, nothing, only dance a little and sing a little and look pretty a whole lot."

"But I have never danced, Camilla, and my voice is quite ordinary."

"That doesn't make any difference so long as you're good-looking," she responded, and sprang from the chair at the sound of the telephone. "I'll bet that's Roy; let me answer it," and promptly she took the receiver from the hook. She listened a moment. "Why, of course, it's Roy. . . . Hello, Roy, hello, hello! You don't want to speak to *me*? Oh, very well!" she pouted, and handed the receiver to me. "It's you he wants, Frizzie, and for my part you're welcome to him."

"Hello, Roy," I said, "I'm so glad you called up."

"I knew that was Camilla's voice at the start," he replied. "How are you, Frizzie? I've just been thinking you might like a ride in the park. Now that Camilla's there, you might take her with you. She'll be company for you. I'll have a taxi at the door for you in ten minutes; I'll telephone straight up for it."

"That'll be bully," said Camilla, as I turned from the telephone. "Roy's always thoughtful and always doing the right thing just at the right moment."

"He didn't seem surprised to find you here, Camilla," I said.

"He was surprised all right, I'll bet, only he's too much

of a gentleman to show it. Between you and me, Frizzie, I always did like Roy, and I never could see why he took to Betty. You're the kind of girl I would pick out for him. I always liked Roy far better than Prince. You see, Prince is getting along. He'll never see thirty-five again, and he's lucky if he's not past forty. I don't mind that, though, and I do like to see the white come around his temples—it gives him such a distinguished look. Isn't it funny he goes with one as young as Roy? But that's the way they always do. I guess Prince has taught Roy most of what he knows, but Roy never will be the sly one Prince is. I've never trusted Prince a minute, and at that I've had my own trouble holding him down. You may think it's all fun here in New York for girls like us, Frizzie, but you'll find there's many the heart-break; and if you only manage to keep your mouth from turning down at the corners you'll do more than the most of us."

"It is difficult for me to follow you, Camilla," I said.

"Oh, it'll all be plain enough to you some day; you'll get your wits sharpened," she said. "Come on, that taxi will be waiting, and it's a beautiful day."

It was as Camilla had said. The air was light and the sky was bright; and everywhere it seemed there was a consciousness of joy in living. I enjoyed the drive immensely, and felt regret when we headed homeward from Central Park.

"Let's go to my apartment for a cup of tea," proposed Camilla, and I gladly consented.

Camilla and Betty shared five rooms on the top floor of a large apartment house. Their windows gave a distant view of the Hudson River, across a field of ugly housetops. Camilla settled me in a Morris chair in the room she called a parlor. On the mantel-

piece was a marble clock. To both sides of the clock were photographs of Camilla and Betty in stage costumes; and also photographs of Roy and Prince. Other pictures of all four were on the walls. On top of the upright piano was a bronze female figure, flung in scanty drapery and poised on one foot, and with the arms extended. Small Oriental rugs were thrown over the green carpet. Over the door the colors of Princeton, Columbia, Yale, Harvard and Cornell, in pennants, were arranged. There were mahogany chairs and chairs in gold. A divan in bright green took up the corner opposite the piano, and was piled high with sofa-pillows. One pillow was worked out of yellow ribbons used to bind panatella cigars by the bundle of fifty. Another pillow bore in many-colored silk a pipe, a cigar, a match-holder, and in the center this ungenerous, unchivalrous, sententious phrase was wrought:

“A woman is only a woman,
But a good cigar is a smoke.”

A colored maid glided in and glided out noiselessly. Camilla poured tea from a silver teapot, and passed wafers on a hand-painted china plate. She took her own cup in one hand and a wafer in the other, then leaned back comfortably.

“We’re pretty cozy here,” she said, “but I don’t mind telling you I’m tired of Betty. Things have not been moving smoothly between us of late, and I told her this morning she would have to get out. I’ve got a proposition to make to you, Frizzie: How would you like to leave that dull, old hotel and come here with me?”

I gazed at her in blank amazement.

“I mean that,” she continued, not giving me a chance

to speak. "Betty and I are through. I don't care for some of the friends she's been running around with lately, and I don't want to live here alone. You'd be perfectly at home here, Frizzie, and we'll get this apartment into some sort of decent shape. You can see what Betty's made of it. All this gaudy truck is hers; she's got no taste, and I simply couldn't stand it a day longer. If she could only sit on her temper she wouldn't be so bad. But she lets it run away with her. She's too quick on the jump. She doesn't deliberate like I do; and if you say you'll come I'll have her move out to-morrow. She's getting ready to move, anyway, so there's nothing that stands in your way. Now what do you say?"

"Why, Camilla, I never thought—I don't know what to say," I stammered. "It's very good and kind of you, and the apartment is so much better than the hotel—but I can't afford it."

"I know how you feel," she said. "I can't afford it—that's the most detestable expression in the language; and I don't mean that because you said it. *I can't afford it*. I've often said that myself, and that's one of the reasons I make the offer to you. I've grown past saying that long ago, however, and some day you'll grow past it. There's only one thing for girls like you and me to do, and that's to follow the line of least resistance. It's what the world expects us to do, and when we don't it won't believe us. So what's the difference?"

"Why, Camilla," I exclaimed, "there's pain and sorrow in your voice."

"I wouldn't be surprised if there were," she replied. "Do you know, there are mornings when I wake up surprised to find I have any feelings left. With you and me this minute, Frizzie, it is a plain question of bread and butter, and it's been that with me for four years now.

You hardly can realize that yet. You never thought, no more than I did, when you were at home where your bread and butter came from; and you never thought where your clothes and the roof over your head came from. Well, you've got to think of those things when you're alone in New York. Life in New York isn't poetry—to get the poetry you've got to be fed and dressed for it; and when that's done the chances are your soul will be so hard you will want only diamonds.”

“I know we could be friends and help each other, Camilla,” I cried, deeply moved by her earnestness; and only guessing at the significance of her words.

“Then it's settled between you and me,” she responded. “Betty will go, and you may come to-morrow.”

“I'll tell you what I shall do, Camilla,” I said. “I shall ask Roy's advice.”

“Yes, if I were you I should ask Roy,” said Camilla slowly. “Roy will advise you, I'm sure he will.” She lifted the teapot and reached for my cup. “You'll have a little more tea, Frizzie?” she asked, and added reflectively: “Yes, you might ask Roy's advice, and you and I will be here together to-morrow.”

“Do you say that, Camilla, because you think Roy will advise me to come to you?” I asked.

“Of course, that is why I say it,” she replied, rousing herself. “What else could Roy advise, if he's got any sense?”

I was prattling about the alterations I should make in the room, when Betty came swinging in with Prince Andrews at her heels. Betty dropped quickly into a chair near the window.

“I didn't expect to find you here, Frizzie,” she said, “and I didn't as much as think certain people knew where you were living.”

"There is more than one way for certain *people* to find that out," said Camilla coldly.

"Oh, if any one's going to find out you may bet it won't slip past Camilla," retorted Betty.

"Now, now, let us have only peace here," said Andrews, stepping forward from near the door and bowing before me. "Ah, my dear, Miss Frizzie, it delights my heart to see you once again, all the more as this meeting is so unexpected. I trust that when I call again you shall be in your hotel, because it gave me acute disappointment not to find you there yesterday and to-day."

"Quit with that line of hot air, Prince," ordered Betty. "I didn't come here to listen to that; I came here to talk business."

"I must pay my compliments to this young lady," objected Andrews.

"You'll have to do that some other time," insisted Betty angrily. "Go over there and sit on that couch, and not a word from you till I get through talking." Andrews hesitated. "I feel like ripping things up a bit," said Betty; and he went and sat on the divan.

"It's all off between you and me then, Camilla?" asked Betty aggressively.

"Yes, it's all off, as you say," replied Camilla.

"Well, you couldn't get me to stay here another day if you were to pay me for it," asserted Betty. "We can't part too soon to suit me. I don't like people that think they're too good for anybody else. Prince and I will get along all right—a sight better than you and he ever got along. You can take Roy and welcome to him—if you think you have a ghost of a show to keep him from somebody else, whose name I'm not mentioning now."

"I think I know who you mean, Betty," said Camilla

quietly, "and I want you to understand you cannot speak about her here or anywhere else in my presence."

"Oh, I can't, can't I, Miss Nifty?" retorted Betty. Well, I'm not going to bother you; I'd rather talk to Frizzie herself." She moved quickly in her chair and faced me. "I had no better luck than Prince," she said. "When I called in the hotel they said you were out, and that they didn't know when you would return. That's the worst of hotels—you give them an order and it's in at one ear and out at the other. When are you going to leave that Old Hens' Roost?"

"Why I haven't thought of it yet, Betty," I replied at once, and without thought to deceive her.

"Well, when you get ready to pack out of there, Frizzie, let me know. I rented a fine apartment just an hour ago, and it's too big for one. Maybe you'd like to run over and look at it."

"I say, Betty," interposed Andrews, "isn't that putting it a little raw?"

"Mind your business, Prince," said Betty sharply. "I know what I'm talking about. It makes this place look shiney, and you won't find a stick of old furniture in it. All the truck I've got in here is going straight to the second-hand store; and I'll have an apartment the way I want it for the first time in my life. We could ride over with Prince in a taxi, Frizzie; you'll come, won't you, Prince?"

"Gladly, if you wish it, Betty," answered Andrews.

"Are you sure you've arranged to have your things taken away this afternoon, Betty?" asked Camilla, with cool deliberation.

"Thank heavens, I have," retorted Betty, "but that isn't what I'm talking about. Will you take a run around there, just to see what it looks like, Frizzie?"

"Thank you, Betty," I said, "I don't care to go—at least, not to-day."

"Oh, very well, to-morrow or the next day will do as well," she replied. "There's no hurry about it, and I'll run down to the hotel and drive you up. You'll like it, I know—it's a little gem of a place." She arose hastily and moved to the door. "Come on, Prince, the air around here's too frigid to suit me."

"I'm glad you find it so," said Camilla, lying back easily in her chair.

"I've had enough of you, all right," said Betty, trying to be on her dignity. "You were mighty glad to have me once, and you think there's nobody half as smart as you are, but we'll see who's going to come out ahead in this little game. Ta, ta!" she ended derisively, and made her exit with a flourish.

"I'll say farewell for the present, Frizzie," said Andrews with a bow, "and you also, Camilla."

"Oh, you needn't include me, Prince," said Camilla.

"Come on, Prince," sounded Betty's voice from the hall.

"Hush," said Andrews with a finger on his lips, "Betty's trying to ride me with spurs and a whip. But you know, Camilla, you know."

"Yes, I know, Prince," said Camilla suggestively, "and you had better be going."

"You're right there, Camilla," replied Andrews. "I've got to humor her a bit." He went into the hall. "Go ahead now, Betty," rang his voice. "Go ahead."

"No; go ahead yourself," came back from Betty promptly. And in another moment the door was shut with a bang.

CHAPTER XXII

I RODE back alone to the hotel, and found Roy nervously walking back and forth on the sidewalk. I led him around the block, and told him of Camilla's plan and invitation. At first he expressed doubt, but quickly he approved of it. He even progressed to the point of crediting Camilla with a "brilliant idea." He even went so far as to persuade me, and the following afternoon he came in his automobile and took me over to the apartment.

On the way I broached the subject of work. He glanced at me curiously; and bluntly said he knew a theatrical manager who might be interested in me.

"Roy," I said with all the severity I could command, "you have spoken of 'theatrical managers' several times, and I tell you once for all I will not go on the stage."

We were at the door of the house where Camilla lived, and he laughed as he assisted me to alight. "We shall discuss that later," he said. "The first thing is to get you settled. After that it will be time enough, and meanwhile give my compliments to Camilla." I stood on the sidewalk while he rode off, and near the corner he looked back and waved his hand to me.

Camilla received me with a kiss, and a pretense at an embrace. She insisted upon taking off my hat with her own hands, then led me into the parlor and showed me a vase filled with flowers.

"Look at those beauties!" she said. "That's what Roy thinks of you."

"Roy sent those—and to me?" I exclaimed in delight.

"Yes, Roy sent them," she replied, as if in regret.

"You didn't get any, Camilla?" I asked.

"Oh, that doesn't matter; I've had so many at one time and another they have almost lost their charm for me," she answered. "But let's sit down and have a minute's chat. A lot has happened since I saw you yesterday. Betty has cleared out, and I guess it's all ended between us. She had her head in the air last night, but I didn't mind. Only if she goes too far I'll get her fired—I stand in with the stage manager, and she's been warned more than once. But we'll forget Betty, and talk about yourself, Frizzie. If you've changed your mind, you can get a chance down in the show now. One of the girls is leaving—she's going to be married. You can't imagine how many girls leave the companies to marry well. They have a better chance than other girls to meet men able to support them, and you might take a try at it. If you don't like the job, of course, you can go somewhere else. That's one advantage of having a free foot."

"Why, do you know, Camilla, I have never been in a theatre?"

"That's all the better," she replied with alacrity. "Experience doesn't count with a girl on the stage. What they want is prettiness. I never knew a stage manager to be interested in a chorus girl's brains. All they care about a girl is for her face and her figure, and whether she can wear good clothes. You needn't worry about that, Frizzie, you'll get your chance at it, all right; and then it's up to you to get on the best way you can. The stage isn't a bed of roses, as some people think it is, but it's fascinating just the same. I guess it's the only place for you and me. Neither of us was born for real

work; by right we ought to be the wives of millionaires. I guess we've got millionaire tastes, and that explains it all. But you've got to take the New York millionaires as you find them, and most of them are married."

"Roy isn't married," I asserted proudly.

"No, he's one that's without a wife-attachment."

"And Prince Andrews isn't married," I pursued.

"No, his marriage is a thing of the past," she responded. "Andrews married young, repented young, and now he's growing old disgracefully." Camilla was pleased with her attempt at humor. "That's nearly bad enough to pass as a joke in musical comedy," she laughed, and grew serious. "Why hasn't Roy taken you to the theatre?" she asked.

"I don't know, Camilla."

"I guess it's because you haven't got those clothes from Sylvie yet. Oh, you needn't look as if you feel humiliated—you've got to get used to that sort of thing. A woman doesn't stand much chance in New York until she's well dressed—she doesn't stand any chance at all. And what's a girl going to do? No man cares where you get the clothes so long as you've got them. That's all they care about, and if you haven't got them you may rest yourself at home, for no man ever will come near you."

"You mean to say, Camilla, it isn't so much myself as the clothes I wear?"

Before Camilla could answer Betty appeared in the door. She flung a key on the floor, and looked at me in fury.

"I thought so!" she cried. "I thought this was what was up, and I didn't give it away yesterday, did I? There's your key for you—for the both of you! I took it with me to come back just like this. I took the pre-

caution of going down to the hotel first. No Frizzie there; and now I'm here on the stroke of the clock! We were up to the same trickery, Miss Camilla, but you couldn't play in the open like I did—you wanted to play in the dark!"

"Stop!" commanded Camilla, rising and facing her. "This is my apartment, and if you don't leave quietly I will telephone downstairs and have you put out."

The threat added to Betty's wrath. She slammed the door, and placed her back against it. "You won't do anything of the kind, Camilla Delmont!" she shouted defiantly. "I'll leave this flat when I'm good and ready. I'm going to speak what's on my mind first, and don't either of you lay a finger on me or you'll get the worst of it."

"You won't say anything here, Betty," said Camilla sternly.

"I will say it," retorted the angry girl. "I'll say all I want to say, and I'd like to see the one's going to stop me."

Camilla's fingers closed on a book on the table.

"Go on, throw it," dared Betty. "Throw it, and I'll make as big a wreck of you as I will of this room, and of her sitting there."

She indicated me with a look of contempt, and I went toward her. "Oh, Betty," I implored, "I thought we all were friends."

"Friends? That's a good one," she retorted, and in bitter reproach added: "Yes, *we* were friends, Camilla and I, until you came along."

"You mustn't bring Frizzie into it," said Camilla.

"I will bring her into it!" cried Betty, and confronted me in wild wrath. "It was you caused all the trouble. We were all right until you came around. You, you;

it's you that's done it, and do you know what I'm going to do to you? You don't? Well, I'll open your eyes—I'll show you the little fool you are!"

"Don't be a simpleton, Betty," said Camilla.

"Not a simpleton, eh? Oh, you always were clever at that, Camilla, but the time's past when you can wind me round your finger. I've had my eyes opened—just as I'm going to open them for this little country interloper." She stamped her foot at me. "What brought you here, anyway? Why didn't you stay at home in the cabbage patch where you belong? Why, I say?"

"I don't know, Betty," I replied, in complete bewilderment.

"Of course, you don't know. That's been you ever since you started edging between Roy and me. You don't know that Roy and I were as you and he are now, do you? You don't know that Camilla and Prince never had a cross word until you blinded his eyes? No, you don't; and you don't know Camilla and I have parted and become enemies because each one of us has been trying to keep on her feet—and all because of you!"

"Please, Betty, don't go any further?" requested Camilla impatiently.

"Yes, I will go further. It's not you I blame so much, Camilla, as this kid that's such an angel—which she isn't." I put my hands to my face in shame, but she went on as passionately as before. "You have great ideas about all that's going to happen in New York! I suppose you're thinking of becoming Roy's wife! A nice, respectable one you'd be to come into millions that way! But you'll get fooled, just as I got fooled. I thought the same, and if Roy saw me in the gutter this minute the most he'd do for me would be to hit me a kick."

"You mustn't say that," I almost screamed. "You mustn't. Do you hear? You mustn't!"

"I'll say anything I like," she flared back. "Roy would kick me, and the time will come when he'll be ready to kick you. They all do it, and it'll be your turn when the next pretty face—like the one you've got now—comes along. Camilla knew what your face meant when she saw it, and I knew, too. We didn't tell each other what we were thinking, but we acted just the same. We knew Roy and Prince thought they were smitten on you; we knew neither of us stood a show. We've been too long at this game not to know a man doesn't care a cent what becomes of you when he's tired, and Camilla laid wires and I laid wires. Roy couldn't start to pull you down where he wanted you by getting you in a flat with me—for I was Roy's girl. Prince couldn't start to drag you down with the help of Camilla—because Camilla was Prince's girl. And Roy and Prince were friends and they couldn't come out in the open and cut each other's throats over you. Camilla knew how the ground lay, and I knew. She knew on which side her bread was buttered, and I knew, too; and when she schemed with Roy to get you I turned around and schemed with Andrews. There's what it all is, you little innocent fool, you! Did you think for a minute this apartment comes from eighteen dollars a week in the chorus? What did Camilla or I care for you? We cared just as much as one girl cares for another. We cared just because we were thinking of rent day, which comes one day every month. We cared because we were thinking of a roof over our heads, and a coat on our backs."

"Betty, Betty, I'll go away," I cried in anguish of spirit.

"Go away!" she returned ironically. "Yes, you'll go

away! You'll go like the rest of us—when you're carried out feet first. What kind of a dream did you have when Roy was spending his time and money on you? What kind of a dream did you have when Prince Andrews brought you flowers, and kept hanging around the hotel? If you hadn't been such a fool and stuck down in that hotel you wouldn't be dreaming now, no, you wouldn't! You'd have your eyes open so that you'd see Camilla and I were bribed to get you."

"Camilla, you were bribed!" I exclaimed.

"I was not," answered Camilla quickly. "I meant all for the best. Betty knows that."

"Yes, you meant it for the best!" railed Betty. "You meant it for the best when you got me out of here and got Frizzie in—for the price Roy's paying you! But I'm not going to let you pluck the plums while I go hungry. If Prince's going to throw me down, I'll put Roy in the way of throwing you down."

"I don't believe a word of all you have said," I asserted vehemently. "I don't believe that Roy or Prince ever tried to deceive me, or that Roy ever was interested in you."

"You don't! You don't!" cried Betty, almost in a frenzy. "Here, I'll show you something! Look at the backs of my hands—my hands here that I hold out! You see the rings on my fingers. Roy gave me those—every one of them—that diamond, and opal, and pearl, and ruby—every one of them Roy gave me! Will you believe that? You see this diamond brooch I'm wearing? Roy gave me that. You see this comb set with diamonds in my hair? Roy gave me that!"

"You never can make me believe it," I affirmed, my voice quivering in emotion.

"Ask Camilla then. Ask Camilla where she got the

rings she's wearing, and her brooches and her combs. Ask her if Prince Andrews didn't foot the bills. Ask her where all this furniture, this flat—where you're going to live—comes from. But you don't have to know!" she screamed. "You know already. Where did you get the money for clothes from Sylvie?"

Camilla came forward. "I gave Frizzie the money for that," she said. "If you wish you can make that part of the plot."

"I'll let it go at that," replied Betty. "One lie's as good as another."

I could endure it no longer. I sank into a chair, and cried in bitterness keener than any I had felt in all my life.

"The floodgates are up at last!" I heard Betty say. "It's time for me to be going."

"I think it is time, Betty," said Camilla.

"Oh, very well, if you say so," sneered Betty, "only tears won't mend what's happened to me."

She went out, and I felt Camilla's hand on my shoulder.

"Don't take on so, Frizzie," she said. "Not a word of all she said is true."

"Don't touch me, please, Camilla," I said, rising. "I'm going."

"Going! Where?"

"I'm going back to the hotel."

"Don't be a fool, Frizzie."

"I'm going."

"I suppose you think I'm contemptible?" she said, and for the first time I detected emotion in her tone.

"I never thought of that, Camilla."

"Oh, yes, you did; you're thinking it now," she replied. "You consider me your worst enemy, and maybe you're right. I know when it's useless to argue. As Betty

would say, 'the game's up,' and you're going to run from me as if I were a leper. I don't blame you, Frizzie, but before you go I wish to say a word." I looked at her, and her lips quivered. "Not in my own defense, either," she added, "although, God knows, there's something that might be said on that score. Sit down one minute. Probably it's the last word ever will pass between us, and you've got time enough for that."

I did as she requested, and we faced each other across the narrow table. She strained forward, and looked at me intently.

"Blunt talk like Betty's is what is wanted now," she said, "because you know, and I know you know. You're going, Frizzie, and you'll never come back; and whenever you think of me after this you'll shudder. You think this very minute I'm one of the worst on earth; you think Betty's an angel compared to me. Maybe you're right, but I'm not going to talk about Betty, and I'm not going to defend myself, I say.

"Only this: Was I altogether wrong in what I did by you when your running away from home and taking up with Roy indicated that you wanted to go straight to hell? That's not polite talk, is it? It doesn't strike me as that, but it's just as polite as the truth will let it. You're thinking I'm an awful sinner, but let me tell you something:

"When I came to New York I wasn't out of a good home like you are, and I wasn't filled with learning like you. I didn't talk two or three languages, and I didn't know the name of one poet from another. But that didn't say I wasn't born to wish for the comforts or the luxuries of life, or whatever you care to call them. I ran away from a drunken father, and I worked down in a department store in Fourteenth Street until I couldn't stand

at a day longer. I was getting my six dollars a week, and paying my four dollars and fifty cents a week for board. I walked three miles night and morning to save carfare, and I went without lunch. At the end of six months, when I wanted a pair of shoes, I still owed seven dollars on a dress that I had bought on an installment plan—paying fifty cents a week—and for all that I stood ten hours a day on my feet six days in the week, and took the ill-humor of women who wouldn't be satisfied, and took the insolence of floorwalkers and other men, aye, and took worse than that. And at the end of the six months where were the things I longed for in my heart? I did have a natural desire for men who were something better, or acted better, than day laborers. I never could go around cheap restaurants, and drink out of cups without handles. I couldn't listen to the coarse, vulgar talk, and I couldn't endure to have a man, with his hair parted in the middle and his nails black and broken, snatch my handkerchief and press it to his lips and press it to my lips as he passed it back. It was worse than my home and my drunken father, I tell you, and I went on the stage, grabbing at it like a drowning person at a straw. And for a time I was happy, and I was able to pay my board, and to buy some clothes, and to ride in the street-cars. You may think that's funny about riding in the street-cars, but they were a luxury those days. Then one night one of the girls asked me if I wouldn't go to supper with her; that a friend of hers who had been sitting 'out front' the night before, had seen me and liked me and had asked her to bring me to meet him. The girl said there was no harm in it, and I went and met Prince Andrews. And he was so polite and courteous; so different to all other men I had met, that I was carried away with him. He never said a wrong word to me, but he sent

cabs around for me to go out riding and take my girl friends out; and he sent me flowers, and had me photographed, and took me here and there, and sent me a diamond ring in a box of candy; and flattered me in a hundred ways until I thought I was living in earnest and my head was turned, and—well, here I am now, Frizzie!

"I could spit on Andrews; I despise him that much. He turns to Betty, as if my feelings were torn to tatters, as if I had no feelings left. He's right; I haven't any feelings left, and it's lucky for me I haven't. Who cares for me? I'm a nobody—a worse than a nobody—and Andrews is respectable. If he were to die to-morrow some preacher would grow eloquent over his grave. If I were to die—who would speak over my grave? Oh, Frizzie, it's a strange world! If you're a man and you're found out, it's all right; if you're a woman and you're found out, it's all wrong. I wasn't grasping and avaricious, either, and, so help me God, Frizzie, if there was one who would give me a chance there isn't another in the world would be squarer than I'd be. You think I'm cold and calculating, but I'm not. It's that I'm on the defensive. I'm trying to hold up my head. I'm trying to keep my feet from slipping any further. I'm trying to hold on till a miracle may happen and I'll be safe. I'm trying to stand up straight, and if the day ever comes when I can do it I'll snap my fingers in the face of Roy Wesson and Prince Andrews and tell them I'm stronger than they ever can hope to be. But I'm fighting single-handed. I've got to fight single-handed, because men won't help me, and because women will treat me worse than men—as you'll treat me after this, Frizzie."

"Camilla, Camilla, I won't, I won't!" I cried, going to the table and giving her an affectionate embrace. "But I am going," I added.

"Of course, you're going," was all she said.

Five minutes later I left her. She had not moved from the chair, but her head had gone down until it rested on the table between her outstretched arms. I went up behind her. "Camilla?" I said. She raised a tear-stained face. I kissed her, and with a great sob she dropped her head between her arms again. I stole away, and closed the door softly.

The elevator seemed to sink down through oppressive gloom. But when I reached the street the sun was shining, and my spirits rose. My tears were dry. I stepped out with more confidence than I had known before, and almost smiling at the illusions which had lured me on.

CHAPTER XXIII

I FOUND my room in the hotel vacant, and it was like a home-coming. I sat down to think of plans, and still was puzzling when Winnie Caine called. We greeted each other like long-lost sisters. She was sorry for having parted from me in ill-humor; I was sorry for having merited her displeasure. We talked long and we talked earnestly; and in the course of our conversation I conceived a scheme, but I did not unfold it to her.

Winnie wished me to come to her home; she wondered why she had not thought of it before. I was delighted with her offer, but I insisted upon delaying a final decision two days. I had my plan, and I was not going to abandon it!

Winnie asked me to tell all that had happened, but I refused. That brought us to a better and more friendly footing. She was gratified I had learned at last, "to keep my mouth shut." She told me every girl should learn to do that, but that few learned, no matter what their experiences. She was insistent, though, in asking my reason for not taking my little satchel and accompanying her home forthwith.

"I shall tell you this much, Winnie," I said. "I am going to be downright wicked. I have an account to settle, and I am going to settle it. Instead of being shot at, I am going to do some shooting myself. I know I should not do it, yet I will do it as a concession to my pride. I want to prove I am not totally devoid of brains;

I am going to scratch—scratch just like a cat. Do you think I could do that, Winnie?”

“I wouldn’t want you to try being a cat on me,” she replied. “I’ll bet you’ve got claws hidden under the velvet.”

“Well, that’s what I intend,” I said, “and two days, I think, will be sufficient for my revenge.”

She had gone only a few minutes when Roy called. I received the news over the telephone from the hotel office, and went down to meet him without the slightest perturbation. I hurried to him with my hand held out, and he did not seem to know what to make of it.

“I should like a short, brisk walk, Roy,” I said. “Come, let’s go out.”

When we had reached the street Roy could contain himself no longer: “Hang it all, Frizzie,” he said, “I’ve done wrong, and I’m heartily ashamed of myself. Tell me to go and jump in the river, and I’ll do it.”

“Camilla has told you I know all about your treachery?” I suggested.

“Don’t rub it in, Frizzie,” he begged. “It’s bad enough as it is. I’ve been a cad. I’ve been such a cad I can’t even ask your forgiveness.”

“Does your remorse come from the fact I discovered your baseness before it was too late, Roy?” I asked.

“Don’t, don’t, Frizzie!” he pleaded. “I’m so guilty I haven’t a word to say in my own defense.”

“Roy, can you keep a secret?” I asked, and looked him squarely in the eyes. My heart thumped violently, but I’m sure I did not show it in my face.

“I could keep anything a secret for you, Frizzie,” he replied.

“Then I’ll tell you, Roy,” I said. “I didn’t come away from Camilla because I thought myself or wished myself

any better than she is. I came away because I decided I wouldn't let her into the secret. Do you understand?"

All the trouble passed from his looks. "Do I understand?" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "Do I understand! Well, I guess, yes! Say, Frizzie, you're a brick, a real brick. I always knew there wasn't another except yourself!"

Oh, the pity of it! I felt a desire to fly at him, but I did not betray my feelings. "Camilla nor Betty must never know, and you must keep it all from Andrews. Swear to me that you never will speak."

"I swear to you on my honor, Frizzie," he replied.

"On your honor, Roy!" I responded. "I am satisfied with that. And you never must whisper a word to Camilla how I deceived her—she thinks I'm an angel."

"I will never whisper it, Frizzie, depend on that."

"You're not surprised at what I have told you, Roy?"

"Why should I be surprised?" Lordy, no; I'm only surprised at my luck—by Jove, Frizzie, you'll never regret this day."

"But, Roy," I pursued, without a quiver in my voice, "I'm not what you imagine me to be. I'm very selfish, and I'm jealous—I'm jealous of all Camilla's got and of all Betty's got. Why should they have such luxury while I have to live in a dark, cramped room?"

"You don't think I'd let you stick in that hole of a place?" assured Roy. "I'm not that kind; you'll find nothing stingy about me."

"I'm going to test you first, Roy," I said. "You must prove your sincerity. I have a weakness for nice things—I have a hunger, a passion for jewels, and I am envious of Betty's.

"What, of those?" he replied. "They're only cheap baubles, and you shall have twice as many and twice as

valuable. But first of all, there's Sylvie's bill. There's no use trying further to keep under cover—it's to be open dealing and truth between us now, Frizzie. I confess I inspired Camilla to take you to Sylvie."

"Yes, Roy, and I suppose Andrews inspired Betty to the same purpose."

"The dog!" said Roy. "He took up with her, did he! He took up with her—took up with her to play foul by me and to play foul by you, Frizzie. I'll teach him. The dog!"

"You mustn't be so severe, Roy," I said.

"Why shouldn't I," he replied, "when the friend you trust turns around and tries to stick a knife in your back? But you didn't go with her, did you?" he asked anxiously.

"No, Roy."

"That's what I might expect of a girl like you—I tell you, Frizzie, you're a winner with me, a clean winner."

"Betty found out I had gone to Sylvie. She chided me with it in that awful scene this afternoon."

"Oh, you can't keep anything secret when you mix up with girls like Camilla and Betty," said Roy. "I suppose some friend of Camilla's or of Betty's saw you together. Sylvie never would utter a word—but what's the difference? We're on another course now, and it's all clear sailing ahead."

"It is clear sailing ahead, Roy," I said in a voice lifted in elation. "There's only one thing I wish to do now."

"What's that?" he asked eagerly.

"Return to the hotel and write to Winnie Caine telling her never to interfere with me again."

"I second you in that, Frizzie," assented Roy. "Get rid of all of them; wipe the slate clean."

"Yes, yes, Roy," I said, and left him hurriedly. I

ran along the corridor to my room, and hid my face in the pillow. I was afraid to look in the mirror—I dreaded the sense of humiliation I should see imprinted there. I never had thought I could be so bold. I was amazed, horrified at myself. Yet, having started, I was determined to go on. So I arose and turned the leaves of the telephone directory until I came to the name of Prince Andrews. I called him up, and arranged to meet him within twenty minutes.

I met him in a Broadway candy shop, where they serve ice cream sodas and hot chocolate at a marble counter or at tables in the rear. We went to a quiet table; a girl with a step-ladder pompadour brought us strawberry sodas, and then I dealt with Andrews as I had dealt with Roy. I prided myself on the ease with which I did it. I should have been ashamed, still neither Andrews nor Roy deserved consideration. I could see the malicious gleam grow in Andrews' eyes. I could see the gloating and the pride in the victory he thought to be his. I did not stop for truth, or anything; and really I was elated over the imposing structure of falsehood I raised. Why quibble over a slight question of veracity with such a man as Andrews? I tried to fix myself like Betty or Camilla, or others I had seen; with my elbows on the table and my chin caught against the backs of my partly-closed hands. I gave a tilt to my hat, and assuming a perfectly reckless expression, delivered my story with gullible tongue. Part of my crime herewith is set forth:

"Oh, Prince, Prince, I've seen the last of Roy and I am yours because I recognized from the first it was to be. I dismissed Roy; I sent him away with the order never to come near me again. And he won't. I hurt his vanity. I told him he was too much of a kid, and that's just what he is, Prince."

"You want a stable person like me, Frizzie," said Andrews, and the malicious self-satisfaction showed in every line and wrinkle in his face. As if under any circumstances I ever could care for such a man! Dishonesty was stamped all over Andrews, but over that was a veneer of what was called "good breeding." It took only a little scratching to find the scoundrel in Andrews, and I uncovered him with a will that day. I talked to him far more freely than I had talked to Roy, because he was so unimaginative he always was hinting at his sense of humor. So I went on:

"I never cared for Roy, and I never will. I've been engaged in a magnificent plot. I've been trying my wits against Roy and Betty and Camilla and yourself, Prince. I played the innocent kid when you brought me the roses; when you sent Betty to run me into debt for clothes so that you might extricate me; I played the same game when Betty wished me to share that apartment with her. Oh, you are the lot of simpletons, Prince! Instead of finding myself wound around your fingers, I have you all wound on my little finger."

"You've made us look foolish, all right, Frizzie," admitted Andrews.

"That's what I have, Prince, and now it's up to you to make good. You've played the game and lost, and I'm going to make you a present of the stakes. What say you? Together we shall sing and dance." I could not restrain the impulse to become extravagant—he was so easy a victim! "I shall be a princess and you shall be my prince, Prince. You shall live out your name—a Prince indeed you'll be!"

"I wouldn't object much to that," said Andrews, "but titles are barred in this country."

I folded my wings and dropped my feet on solid earth.

"Now, Prince, I'll tell you—these are the conditions: A home there must be—a home even as good or better than Camilla's or Betty's. Oh, Prince, before you get through with me, you'll think I'm frightfully expensive—and jewels must come first! Are you frightened? No? You're right in thinking that—far better to have it over and done with than trailing along indefinitely. Then, jewels it is! One ring, one brooch, two rings, two brooches—no, I won't be hard, I'll leave that to you, Prince. Only, the jewels first as an evidence of good faith."

The fellow dared to slip his hand over mine. I shuddered, but I bore it.

"You shall have anything your charming little heart desires," he said.

"Thank you; thank you, Prince," I said rising, for I could not endure his hand on mine a moment longer. "I'll give you two days to prove it."

I left him hurriedly as I had left Roy. The two interviews and the two partings had been substantially alike, the only difference being temperamental between Roy and Andrews. I ran along the corridor again to my room; again I hid my face in the pillow. But only for a moment. The ridiculous side of the situation struck me, and I sat up on the side of the bed and laughed until the tears came. Honestly I did, and thus I saw that comedy and tragedy are twin sisters.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE following afternoon two packages were delivered by special messengers, one from Roy and one from Andrews. I lifted the lids and two cards fell out. I let them lie on the floor, and placed the boxes with their glistening contents side by side on the table.

It would be false of me to say I was not a little impressed. Oh, girls, girls, have we not a hard fight against our vanities! I could feel my heart quickening up, just because there was enough of the barbaric in me to covet the lot. I was not angelic, far from it. I took all the rings, slipped them on my fingers, and held up my hands and examined the effect from every possible angle. It was beautiful! And no doubt of it: My hands were made for rings! My slender, tapering fingers did not flaunt them forth like the stubby fingers of Betty; they were more refined to the use than the bloodless fingers of Camilla. I could see that plainly, as I gazed upon my gem-laden fingers in the light of the window; and as I gazed it was not so easy for me to resist. Oh, Betty and Camilla! As I stood there in my uncertainty I came to know you better. Whatever the cause, a wave of sympathy swept us three together, and deep down in my heart a voice called that you were my sisters. If only heaven drew near and dazzled like that!

I had shaken off temptation before Winnie was announced over the telephone. I requested that she come upstairs to me, and left the plush-covered boxes open on

the dressing-table. She saw the jewels the moment I opened the door, and her smile faded. She stepped over, glanced at the cards, which I had picked up, and turned on me.

"So this is the price?" she said.

"Yes, that is the price, Winnie," I replied.

"And you're not coming home with me?"

"Of course I am, Winnie."

"With these?"

"Oh, no."

"What are you coming with, then?"

"I can't tell you now, Winnie, but I will tell you when I come."

"I don't know that I ever want you to put a foot inside our door," she said, her voice filled with bitter scorn. "But Six Pond Street is the number, and drop in sometime when you want to tell me about it—only don't come around with any of these things on."

"I will tell you now, Winnie," I said. "Let me explain."

She went to the door. "Explain! I don't care to hear any explanation. You're out for yourself. Make the best of it. And if that's the price, you're selling yourself cheap. Make them go deeper. Stick them both for a diamond dog-collar and a six-cylinder automobile. Do it quick, too, for now's your only chance. It won't come so easy when the bloom is off your cheek."

She pulled the door firmly behind her. I made a note of her address, and went uptown to Mme. Sylvie's. I paid her in full out of my little store, and had the frock and cloak sent after me to the hotel. I looked over the theatrical advertisements in a newspaper, telephoned to Roy, and told him I wished to go to the first performance that night of "A Warrior Bold." He hesitated until

I told him bluntly I had received garments for evening wear, then he became willing and enthusiastic. I telephoned to Andrews and told him also I wished to see "A Warrior Bold." When Andrews telephoned an hour and a half later that he had obtained tickets I insisted I could not stir from my room because of a headache.

Roy called for me with a carriage. I had been arrayed an hour, and I went down to meet him possessed of a feeling of intense gratification. I felt my power. I beamed upon Roy. I played with him as a cat with a mouse. He was in ecstasy over my appearance. He avowed I was more than pretty. I held my head high; I accepted his adoration as a matter of course.

"The rings and the bracelet and the brooch and the watch are beautiful, Roy," I said, "but you understand why I do not wish to wear a single one of them to-night?"

"I understand, and you are perfect in everything," he responded. "There are so few women of taste it is a delight to be with you, Frizzie. You look infinitely sweeter without those disfiguring things."

"You will let me keep them, though, Roy, to gratify the barbarian in me?"

"That's not fair, Frizzie.. I've put that little gift out of my mind, and never want to speak or think of it again. Let us talk about something more interesting."

"Let us talk," I said taking him up, "about the restaurants we have frequented in the evenings, and which you deceived me were the very best."

"Please, let up on a fellow, Frizzie," he pleaded, evidently hurt.

"We must uncover every truth before we go further, Roy," I said. "It wasn't my 'wit and beauty' altogether, now was it? Wit and beauty count for little until they

are in the proper setting—is that what I am to suppose? The frame is of more importance than the picture; the woman in New York is not to be judged by her face, but by her clothes—is that it, Roy?”

“Oh, I know I’m a cad, Frizzie, but it isn’t all as bad as you think. It looks blacker against me because you’ve found me out. Oh, I tell you there are other things you’ll find out. You’ve been thinking, perhaps, I’m stronger than other men. Well, now that you’ve torn so much of the mask off me, I’ll tell you I’m weaker than other men. I’m weaker than Norman. I’m as weak as the world around me; I’m puny, and mean, and cramped just like the life I lead. But I’ll say this, Frizzie: If Norman and I were to change places, he would be weak and I would be strong. Don’t be too hard on me; you can’t imagine what it means to fight temptation every day and every hour.”

“I don’t agree with what you say about Norman,” I said.

“You think I’m the stronger, Frizzie? Then you do still hold a little faith in me? Oh, that’s fine; that’s bully! I was afraid you might be thinking of returning to Covey because of all I’ve said and done.”

The carriage drew up outside the theatre. “Here we are, Roy,” I said excitedly. “Don’t spoil this evening for me. Come, come, I promise you I never will go near Covey again. Let’s live to-night, Roy!” I pressed his hand wilfully as I stepped out, and I was surprised as I looked at him to see red rise in his cheeks. We moved in with a stream of laughing, animated men and women, and the spirit of light and life thrilled me. We went up a narrow stairs to a balcony box. The asbestos fire-curtain had not been raised. A few musicians were

yawning in the orchestra pit, and Roy directed my attention to the audience sweeping down the aisles.

"Look there, Frizzie," said Roy. "You see that tall, divine-looking creature gliding down the center aisle. Can't you see!—the one with that man-mountain in the background. That's the one. Now watch. They'll take the two aisle seats to the right in the front row. They're regular first-nighters; the same seats always are reserved for them."

"She's magnificent," I said in a subdued tone.

"Of course, she's magnificent," replied Roy. "See, there they go into the seats as I said they would. That magnificent creature gets all her frocks from Paris. That pearl necklace she's wearing cost seventy-five thousand dollars if it cost a cent. She probably has about fifteen thousand dollars on her fingers and another fifteen thousand dollars in her hair."

"I feel very small, Roy," I said.

"Oh, humbug, the woman's got no imagination!" he responded. "Look at the size of the hand that man-mountain has dropped over the arm of his chair. It would make a decent-sized ham. Look at the diamonds he's wearing. When diamonds are thrown around carelessly like that you may depend there's grossness goes with them."

"How could she ever marry him, Roy?" I asked.

"Marry him!" repeated Roy, and laughed.

"Do tell me what it is, Roy," I said, "or I shall be thinking dreadful things."

"You can't think things too dreadful to fit that kind of living in New York," he replied.

"She's not his wife, then?" I persisted.

"I won't say she's not," responded Roy, "and I will say I have some sympathy for her. She married an English

army officer—one of those officers one remove from a title. She married for love; the officer married for money, and when he found she had only her beauty he deserted her.”

“He didn’t love her!” I exclaimed, genuinely shocked.

“Love her!” echoed Roy. “All the love she’s ever known has come from that roly-poly at her side. He was in Paris when it happened, and he heard she was almost penniless, and sent her back to her parents. There’s a big heart in him—when you want a big heart you’re safe in picking the man who wears diamonds for buttons on his waistcoat. But that’s aside from the case—naturally the man-mountain looked her up when he returned from abroad, naturally she was grateful, and, without going any further, there they are before you.”

“But that doesn’t happen often—to be deserted in Europe on the honeymoon?” I asked, fearing for the safety of my castle in the air.

“No, not often,” replied Roy slowly, “because unfortunately the majority of our girls who marry foreigners have money.”

“Are there any others, Roy, who have had such a dreadful experience?”

“She doesn’t think it dreadful,” answered Roy. “At least, not now. You haven’t got a focus on New York yet. You see that sour-faced woman trotting down the aisle with the round-shouldered youth at her heels? Look there! The woman—and the man following her obediently like a trained poodle!”

“Oh, yes, I see, the old woman and the young man—like mother and son!”

“Like husband and wife,” said Roy.

“How could that be?” I asked in astonishment.

"Easy enough. Divorce," answered Roy. "He's her fourth husband."

"Fourth!" I repeated incredulously.

"No. 1 was divorced, No. 2 was divorced, No. 3 was divorced," said Roy, "and for all I know there may be a divorce in pickle for No. 4. But No. 4—that's the poodle—doesn't care. Before Mrs. Somebody-Somebody-Somebody promised to honor and obey him she settled ten thousand dollars a year for life on him. If she took a fancy for a No. 5 that would provide for the discarded No. 4 until he'd bargained his youth to another of New York's rich old women."

"What has become of the husbands that have gone?" I asked.

"Married again," replied Roy. "Mismated couples here in New York are so impatient they can hardly wait for divorce to rush into wedlock again."

"What do the children do?" I asked, unable to restrain my curiosity.

"Children? Ho, ho!" said Roy derisively. "If I were to meet one of those women of millions wheeling a baby carriage in Fifth Avenue I'd call a policeman. I'd be certain she'd gone into the East Side, or some other normally populous part of the city, and turned kidnapper."

"It shocks me to hear you talk so lightly, Roy," I said in real sincerity.

"It shocks me," he replied, "but you couldn't imagine how that woman came to marry No. 1? Her father was a faro dealer out West. He straightened up and went prospecting. He struck silver, died a United States senator, and left his daughter fifteen or twenty millions. She had more suitors than she could count. She sent for the whole pack of would-be capitalists. She wrote their

names on slips of paper, and dropped the slips into an Egyptian jar. 'Boys,' she said, 'the law prevents me marrying all of you—the one whose name I draw is *the one*.' She reached into the jar, took out a slip, read the name, and that same afternoon eloped with the winner of the lottery. You see, she was something of a gambler like her father."

"They really eloped?" I gasped.

"Certainly," responded Roy. "And she laughs to-day and tells No. 4 it was the romantic prank of an unsophisticated girl."

"This is what is called life in New York, Roy?"

"It's one side of New York life," replied Roy. "Only one—the side you usually find at a New York first-night. Look there, Frizzie! In the center aisle again—enter the gay broker brigade! And there's the banker brigade escorting the adventuring-actress brigade—oh, they're coming so fast now I can't distinguish between them for you. But I'll run over a few—there's the wigmaker brigade, the dressmaker brigade, the millinery brigade, the shirtmaker, tailor, gambling-house keeper, restaurant-keeper, wine agent, song-writer, divorce-lawyer and grafting-politician brigades. Oh, I tell you, the New York first-night audience is a social paradise."

"It is all so different from what I had imagined, Roy."

"I know it," he replied. "The honest shopkeepers and their wives come here from Chicago and St. Louis and Kansas City once a year, and they go to a first-night and pick out this one as a Vanderbilt and that one as an Astor, and think they're having a giddy time. If there's any culture at a New York first-night it's never noticed in a back seat. . . . But there goes the curtain. Now watch: There'll be a blizzard and icicles for two acts and then in the last act June roses."

Roy was right. For two acts trouble grew. For two acts the Fates visited distraction upon the hero and the heroine. For two acts these two were chilled by cruel winter—the north wind howled, the snow whirled in fury, the frost bit to the marrow, all Nature was unkind! Then, presto! the birth of spring, the buds breaking into leaf on the trees and in the hedgerows, the sparrows twittering in the eaves, the robin redbreast hopping on velvety lawn, the snowdrop peeping, the daffodil lifting its golden head! Again, presto! and summer is here—summer, with the droning bees flitting from petal to petal sipping the nectar up; summer, with the cool streams rippling in their rocky beds, with the hills rearing their wooded crests to the azure sky, with the lowing kine browsing in the verdant valleys, with the sun going down like a ball of fire in the west, with the moon rising like silver in the east, with the fireflies lighting their myriad lamps under the shadowy elms; summer, with the shades of night falling, and, at last, the hero and the heroine meeting at the rustic stile to pledge eternal love while the world stands still to listen!

So it ran, and I sat there new to it all and was deeply impressed. I joined in the laughter and the applause, and, upon my word, I caught several tears on my cheeks on the end of a timid finger. The author came out, and there were cries of "Speech, Speech." I pitied the poor man. He said: "I thank you for your splendid reception in behalf of the company and myself. I thank you, I thank you, I thank you; from the bottom of my heart, I thank you." Between the acts the orchestra was almost drowned by the babble of voices. Men went up and down the aisles. Small boys in tight uniforms served water to the women. Roy leaned forward in his chair and bowed and smiled to this one and that one. He leaned

back and told me that Prince Andrews and Betty Collins were in seats almost directly below us. Half a dozen men came up the narrow stairs, and were introduced by Roy, and talked about the play and the "hit" it was. Women fixed me through opera glasses, and I bore their scrutiny without wavering. With a final burst of applause the performance came to an end. I went down the stairs ahead of Roy, and in the crush at the bottom I almost collided with Betty. Andrews saw me and looked as if thunderstruck. Betty turned to him.

"What did I tell you, Prince?" she said significantly. "Maybe you'll believe what I tell you now."

"Hello, Andrews," said Roy, without a sign of the enmity he felt. "Are you not going to speak to a fellow?"

"Come on, Prince," said Betty imperatively. "You know who are your friends, all right."

She deliberately pressed Andrews before her, and he seemed not unwilling to go.

"What's the matter with you, Betty?" asked Roy. "How is it you're not on to-night with 'The Golden Bells'? Playing hookey again, I suppose?"

She looked back for a moment. "I'm not playing hookey, thank you," she replied tartly. "I've got your angel child that's with you to thank for seeing the show. Miss Angel Face set Camilla on me, and that's why I'm here. Camilla had the pull, and I'm out of 'The Golden Bells'—if the news will do you any good. . . . Come on, Prince; this is no place for you and me."

Roy and I dismissed Betty and Andrews from our thoughts. We drove to a restaurant in Broadway near Forty-second street, and I looked around upon a midnight picture of gay New York. What was the picture? In its heavy lines, good clothes, good food, good wine

and plenty of it! There was much laughter—and it was insincere. There was a constant babble of voices—and the sound meant nothing. Men and women alike lolled with elbows on tables. Against the gold ceiling pressed a haze of cigarette smoke. Screened by a fence of palms an orchestra sent out the alluring strains of "Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly?"

At the table next to ours a youth poured wine until a glass overflowed and a stream started across the tablecloth and trickled to the floor. At another table a man well on to middle-life tried to hang rings of smoke on the tip of the tilted nose of a girl of seventeen or eighteen. At another table a bulgy-eyed, red-faced, thick-necked, bald-headed man slipped a ring from a young woman with her hair so blonde that it almost shrieked, and holding it up on the end of a fat, chubby little finger, insipidly declared, "Now we're married!" At still another table a languid beauty calmly opened her gold vanity box and powdered her nose.

"There's a newcomer in the corner," said Roy. "She won't be so shrinking and demure in a month."

"Perhaps I look shrinking and demure, Roy," I suggested.

"I wish you would not persist in misunderstanding me, Frizzie," he replied with some impatience. "You know when I spoke I never thought of you, and could not think of you in that connection."

"I did not mean to offend you, Roy," I said. "It was only that I was a little curious."

"Just sounding me, that's all, isn't it?" retorted Roy with returning good-nature.

"Yes, I confess that's it."

"I like you because you are so contrary, Frizzie," said Roy, leaning far across the table. "Have you guessed

there are a score of men I know here that are only waiting for a nod from me to come over and meet you? But I won't nod to them; I'm going to be selfish and keep you all to myself. I won't let any of them come over here to contaminate you or me—this is our night, Frizzie. That's what it is! and are you going to keep me to that pledge against one little drop? I'll keep it if you say so—but to-night's our night, Frizzie."

"Have you kept your pledge, Roy?" I asked.

"No, I haven't," he answered boldly, "and I was just about to tell you so. I had one drink to-day, one yesterday and one the day before yesterday. That's all, Frizzie; and now you and I will have one little drop and then we'll start off even on the prohibition game. We'll only split a pint of Red Seal; and we'll turn down our glasses when they're empty and swear never to touch liquor again."

"How many times have you promised, Roy?" I asked.

"Oh, a couple of score of times, I guess," he replied, "but I'm in dead earnest this time, and you'll find out that I am."

"Drink, Roy, drink, if you desire it," I said, "only don't ask me to drink with you."

"You mean that, Frizzie—*it is* our night, then! Here, waiter!"

The smoke grew thicker; the babble of voices grew louder; the laughter grew more insincere and hollow; the orchestra played, "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now."

"Roy," I said, "you have emptied your glass several times, and you have not turned it down."

"Neither I have, but why should I, Frizzie? Now, why should I? We're only young once, and when we're young let us enjoy ourselves." He filled up the glass again, and raised it to me. "Here's to you, Frizzie, and there's not another girl in the world I'd have sitting there

but you. This is the last time, and you see I know how to take care of myself. I've taken care of you, haven't I? I've kept those wasters away, haven't I? Of course, I have—they daren't come over here till I give the sign, and I won't give the sign! They may go to the devil for all I care—they're wasters the whole lot of them. You see that red-headed fellow over there trying to keep his head off his breast. Well, he's only twenty-five, and you see what he is. His old man has got forty or fifty millions, and the boy's got fifty thousand a year pin money and that isn't enough; he borrows from his mother and never pays her back. That same fellow wanted to marry my sister May, but you bet, father sent him out of the house on the double-quick; and May had a hand in it, too. May agreed with father there wouldn't be a drunken waster in *our* family—and they're all wasters that want to come over to this table and break wine with you, Frizzie! But I won't let them; I'll keep the ghouls at a safe distance! No one will harm a hair in your head, Frizzie, and they can all go their own way and we'll go ours. That's right—we'll go our way, Frizzie. It's just you and me, Frizzie; just you and me, my little charmer."

Roy reached out a hand toward me, and I drew back.

"Pardon me, Frizzie, I forgot," he said. "It's the wine. Isn't wine the funny thing for making men forget themselves!"

Roy nodded his head in seriousness for a few moments, then his flushed face broadened in a smile of satisfaction.

"I knew all along I wasn't mistaken in you, Frizzie. You're the brick I always thought you to be. You won me that afternoon on the knoll. You remember that afternoon? Wasn't it glorious there, dreaming, the two of us. You were wise never to marry that stick Clark.

You've too much imagination for him, Frizzie. He'd weight you down so that you never could rise to reaching distance of a cloud. We'll get along all right, and you'll never regret what you've done. I'll stick by you, and you'll stick by me—I tell you we're a pair of trumps, we are, Frizzie! What do we care for the rotters here? They're old players; they're hardened—you couldn't crack the shells on them with a hammer. No, you couldn't, but with you and me it's different, Frizzie—we're just learning to fly! It's great to find a girl like you that has never tasted liquor. I was praying you wouldn't poison your breath with it to-night, and you didn't—oh, the good sort you are! I admire you more than I can tell, Frizzie. By heaven! if it wasn't for what the *mater* would say, do you know what I'd do, Frizzie? I'd marry you, that's what I'd do."

"We will go, Roy," I said firmly, and without feeling the slightest emotion.

"Go where?" he said. "Back to that hotel? Not much. You heard what I said, Frizzie? I meant that; by God, I meant it, and we'll be married yet." He struck the table with his open hand. "I meant what I said, Frizzie," he repeated, and suddenly he threw back his head and laughed loudly. "We'll get married, Frizzie," he said. "In the sweet by and by, we'll get married."

"You must take me back to the hotel," I said.

"Oh, if you want it that way, Frizzie, I'm agreeable. I don't forget my promise—two days it was, and the two days are up to-morrow. Hasten to-morrow."

We drove rapidly through streets now deserted save for an occasional belated vehicle like our own. Roy alighted before me, and when I gave him my hand he held it fast. On the sidewalk he attempted to draw me to him.

"Don't you think I deserve a kiss by this time?" he said in a low, determined tone as I resisted. "Yes, I do. Kiss me."

But I pulled myself free, and fled from him.

CHAPTER XXV

HARDLY had I entered my room than the telephone rang, and, as I anticipated, it was Andrews. I was prepared for him, for just such a conversation was part of my plot.

"Oh, Frizzie, Frizzie, I'm almost heartbroken," he lamented. "I thought you would be in Rector's, and three times I have left Betty fuming at the table to telephone to you. I suppose it's all off now, and you've given me so much the worst of it, you know."

"Not at all, Prince," I said gaily. "Can't you reason it out? I'm piling disappointment upon Roy for tomorrow. He will wake up to find the little bird flown."

"You mean that, Frizzie?" asked Andrews, as if taking hope.

"Certainly, I mean it," I said. "You saw I didn't wear one of the rings, or the bracelet or the brooch or the watch—and I must thank you now for all of them, Prince. They are beautiful, beautiful; and I only trust you think I am deserving of them."

"Cheap baubles! You just wait, Frizzie! I'll pay you a tribute that will mean something—when we know each other better."

"You could not guess what I am doing now, Prince? I have the rings on my fingers, the bracelet on my wrist, the brooch at my throat, and the watch on, too; and I am admiring them all in the mirror. I'm just raving over them, Prince—just raving."

"That's bully of you, Frizzie," said Andrews, and I could mark the satisfaction in his voice. "That's my reward, and it's the only reward I ask."

"To-morrow I will tell you how delighted I am, Prince. Come at three o'clock. Roy is to come at four, but we shall be safely away long before then."

"Betty's glowering at me through the glass panel in the door, Frizzie. I must hurry or she may put her gloved fist through it. Good-by; I will be there on the minute—before three o'clock, long before it."

I took out the plush-covered boxes, and moved them slowly around and around in front of me to see the light play on them. I sat down on the side of the bed, and placed the boxes on my knee. I gave myself to a soliloquy although I often had heard that persons who soliloquize are likely to become insane. But I don't believe that; I believe soliloquy is the highest form of sanity. Still, no matter—I sat down and lectured myself in plain, honest terms.

"What if you were not pretty, Miss Peabody?" I asked. "What if you were thirty-nine instead of nineteen? Would these jewels have been offered to you? Would Winnie have been interested in you? Would Camilla and Betty have quarreled about you? Would Roy and Prince Andrews have made fools of themselves for you? Would you have been put in the way of making a little fool of yourself—if you were thirty-nine? What questions! You cannot answer one of them, and yet the answers seem easy? Oh, you say that every such problem of life seems easy and apparent until we try to think into it. Well, I won't press you further, Miss Peabody; only please don't let those questions slip your mind. They may be of use to you some day, even though you don't understand them now."

I rather enjoyed this taking to task of myself, and I found myself employing gestures, modulating my voice, and on the whole acting as if I really was addressing somebody in the flesh before me.

"You don't think Covey is such a terrible place now, do you, Miss Peabody? No, no, you don't, but you never shall go back there—no, never, never, never! Well, we won't discuss that point, except to say I like to see you so emphatic. It's a splendid thing to be emphatic, especially when you know what you are talking about. But I will say this to you, Miss Peabody: You don't feel so very, very hard toward your father at present? No—aye, I thought that. You are beginning to see now with the eyes of experience—with the eyes of the experienced young person who sits here now catechizing you. And you are thankful for the self-reliance your father's example instilled in you. You are thankful he did not humor the romance in you. You are thankful for his sternness and for his coldness, because they threw you back upon yourself and gave you strength for every crisis. You could love your father now; yes, you could love him—you could love him because his resolution gave you resolution, because his strength to dare gave you also the strength to dare! After all, Frizzie, are you not a child of environment? Of course, of course, you are, and you have not run away from your father. Now, have you? You don't think so, and I agree with you. Your father has been at your elbow wherever you have gone, and everything he ever has done has acted as a guide to you. So at last you see that when you ran away from Covey to gain independence, or whatever other thing you may have had in mind, you had to take Covey with you, and you have not been able to be yourself alone.

"One other phase of this interesting case of yours, Miss Peabody: You remember when you were riding on the train to New York you vowed to yourself you would stand alone, and that no one in all the big city would be permitted to influence your life? Yes, you remember; and now in this moment of searching of the heart you confess you have not kept your vow. You need not hang your head at the confession; it is the confession we all must make. You could not stand alone any more than I. You have repeated the vow in secret every night and every morning, and not one day has the vow been kept. Ah, you dear, silly little girl, when will you know you cannot achieve the impossible? Winnie has influenced you; Roy and Andrews, Betty and Camilla have had their influence upon you—again you are a child of environment. But hold up your head! You have done all or more than might have been expected of you. If you have been influenced you have not been controlled, and your destiny remains your own."

With that I ceased my serio-comic business. I took the boxes again and placed them on the dressing-table so that I could survey their contents in the mass with my head on the pillow. I turned out the light and laid myself down and watched the gleam of the jewels in the moonlight filtering into the room. How long I watched I know not, but suddenly the scene was changed and I was queen on a throne.

I was a real queen, and beside me on the throne was Roy. I wore a crown—and a crown was on the head of Roy and in his hand was a golden sceptre. Robes of ermine fell from his shoulders and from mine. Plumed knights in glistening armor and ladies in cloth of gold prostrated themselves before us. Six men in bright scarlet blew six blasts upon trumpets, and the whole court,

as in one voice, shouted: *Long live the King and Queen!*

I awoke to more interesting and less picturesque reality. I looked out and the sun was striking hot upon the flat roofs. I was impatient to be away, but it was with care I removed the tags bearing my name and wrapped and tied up the jewels almost exactly as I had received them. I called a messenger boy by telephone, and awaited him in the hotel office. There I entrusted to him for delivery the two tiny, innocent-looking boxes—the one Andrews had sent with his card addressed to Camilla, the one Roy had sent with his card addressed to Betty.

It was in a spirit of glee I watched the boy go. I paid my bill, turned my back on the hotel, and headed for Winnie's, my step as light as a feather.

CHAPTER XXVI

NO. 6 POND STREET was a five-story brick structure, with its front disfigured by two fire-escapes, their landings at each floor made hideous by collections of bottles and tins, and bedclothes spread out to air. A double door, with dusty frosted-glass panels, opened on a narrow hall, the sides faced with imitation marble and showing two rows of electric-bell buttons. I made out the name "Caine" on a scrap of paper, yellow with age and stuck behind a cracked, circular piece of wood holding the electric button in position. I pressed the button and began to ascend the stairs. I had gone up three flights and was half-way to the top of a fourth when I saw Winnie leaning on the railing and quietly watching me.

"Well, here I am, Winnie," I said briskly.

"I can see that," she replied, as I mounted the last few steps. "Come right in and make yourself at home."

I took no notice of the sarcastic turn which meant anything but an invitation, but followed her into a cramped parlor. She waited for me to pass and closed and locked the door.

"I want this door locked," she said, "because I want to have this business ended without anybody interfering." I glanced at a door which led back into the flat. "Never mind that," she went on. "Mother and Stella won't butt in unless I call them. They heard the bell and they know

it's you or somebody else to see me. Now what have you got to say, coming here like this?"

"You are thinking of the jewels, Winnie?"

"No, I don't care for them—I'm thinking of what they stand for, what they mean between you and me."

"I sent the jewels back," I said, with a pride I could not conceal.

"You sent them back?" she repeated, with skeptical emphasis. "Tell that to anybody you like, but not to me."

"I did, Winnie, I did. I sent them back, but not to Roy nor to Andrews."

"Andrews was mixed up in it too, was he?"

"You know, Andrews, Winnie?"

"Know him?" she echoed strangely. "Yes, I happen to know him. But go on, tell me what you did, where you sent them. Tell me that you're not human like the rest of us girls, and I'll drink it all in."

"You mustn't doubt me, Winnie, because it's all true—true, every word of it."

"Yes, I know it's true, but are you going to let me hear the wonderful thing that happened?"

"There is nothing wonderful," I asserted. "I simply determined to teach Roy and Andrews a lesson, and I sent the jewels to two girls who knew them and who once trusted them. It may have been silly, but it was fun."

She started forward, caught me by the arm, and dragged me close to the window. "How am I to know that or believe it?" she asked, gazing intently into my eyes. "Will you swear this minute that's the truth?"

"I will swear it if you wish me to, Winnie," I said, and she suddenly released my arm.

"Take off your hat and count yourself one of the

family," she said. "Stop here as long as you have a mind to. I want to take lessons from you. We're all pikers compared to you."

In the change that had come over her she took off my hat herself, dropped it on a chair, and left the two hat-pins sticking straight up from the crown. She pressed me down on an old, faded couch and seated herself beside me. The whole room was old and faded. A dilapidated curtain covered the window. On the walls in black and fly-specked gilt frames were impossible prints, all of alleged romantic nature. A gas fixture with two jets seemed about to part company from the ceiling, from the perpendicular stem of the fixture itself was suspended a red paper ball. There was a mantelpiece without a suggestion of a grate, and the mantelpiece was nicked and scraped; and on it stood a clock bare of hands and a delph Cupid with his bow arm broken. On a small round-table beside the window was a battered sewing-basket, and a family album held in a celluloid back.

"I'm glad you handed that dose to the two of them," said Winnie. "You don't blame me, though, for feeling a bit sore. It looked raw, you'll admit that, after what had happened."

"I understand how you must have felt, Winnie."

"But who is this Andrews fellow, anyway?" she asked.

"Why, I thought you said you knew him, Winnie?"

"I thought myself at first I did, but one meets so many people they're likely to get them mixed up. But what's the difference? You gave them a dose of their own medicine, and they'll never get over it. They'll be all the stronger for you now. Look out for that. It's the only way to treat a man—just hit the brute with a club and he'll lick your hand."

"You haven't asked me about the girls to whom I sent the jewels, Winnie?"

"And I won't," was her quick retort. "What good would that do me? They're two out of how many? When you learn as much as I have learned by simply looking on you'll not bother about names, for that's all it amounts to. One name to-day, another name to-morrow—that's how the girls come in and go out in New York. Thank heaven, Frizzie, you're something more than a name now. You haven't given those devils a chance to say six months or twelve months from now, 'You remember that Frizzie girl—wasn't she a hummer?' I tell you, Frizzie, I admire you. If I had one-half your grit I'd take a whip and make a few men I know dance a hornpipe. . . . But wait here a second."

She ran out of the room, and returned quickly with a dear, little baby girl in her arms and her mother and Stella behind her. No formality was wasted. Mrs. Caine and Stella both came over and kissed me—a thing Winnie never had done. Stella was a frail, little creature, with great, round blue eyes and a small, narrow mouth drooping at the corners. Mrs. Caine was fat and flushed of face, and her hands were red and rough. She refused to let me rise from the couch, but stood over me patting my hair.

"Winnie's been telling Stella and me all about you, dear. Lordy, Lordy, how you girls do come here, and not knowing a thing what it's like! It's a sin to see a good-looking girl like you, dear, turned loose in New York with no one to look after you. I wish we poor old mothers could be left to do for our daughters, but who cares for us?"

"Now, mother!" reproved Winnie.

"That's Winnie herself for you, dear," continued Mrs.

Caine. "She's never known what it is to be without a mother, and if she hadn't me to run to maybe she'd talk different. What would Stella be doing this minute if I hadn't kept the home together and had it for her to turn to when her man went back on her? I wish I had a home big enough for all the girls in New York; I'd take them all in and I wouldn't ask anything better than being a mother to them."

"You don't object to my stopping with you for a few days, Mrs. Caine?" I asked.

"Mind, child? Indeed, I don't—I' mind if you wanted to go away and leave us. One mouth to feed more or less doesn't make any difference, and when Winnie's spoken for you it's all right. I've always worked in with my daughters, and I'm proud of them both—they're good girls."

"No boasting, mother," said Winnie, smiling. "That's one of mother's weaknesses, Frizzie—to boast her two girls are the best in the world."

"Of course, you're the best daughters in the world, you little tearaways," said Mrs. Caine, bustling toward the door. "Dear knows, though, you've been enough trouble to me, but what's a mother's life without trouble? . . . Stay here and talk the three of you and spoil Stella's baby. I must be off to my kitchen; I can smell that pie burning."

I heard the good woman humming to herself as she went back along the dark, narrow hall.

"Why don't you say something, Stella?" asked Winnie. "You wouldn't think, Frizzie, she's three years younger than I am? She is, and she looks ten years older."

The girl had taken a position near the window, and

she turned her face away until it almost brushed the curtain.

"She's been that quiet ever since she came back home," added Winnie. "I'd get over it if I were you, Stella. Isn't the baby enough for you. He's not worrying his head about you, and I wouldn't worry my head about him. You don't imagine he ever thinks of you?"

Stella looked sorrowfully at her sister. "How do I know that?" she asked. "If he was thinking and I wasn't, think how terrible it would be, Winnie?"

She stepped over and caught the baby nervously to her breast, and gazed down at it with mother's love in her eyes.

"If you don't know he never thinks of you and doesn't care a cent for you, Stella, I know," said Winnie. "What kind of a man is he that deserts the girl he's married and their baby? I wouldn't give a snap of my fingers for him. I'd let him go and I'd say good riddance for it. You cried over him too long, Stella. He forced you into the divorce, and what are you crying over him yet for?"

"Oh, Winnie, Winnie, don't you see it's not so much him as the baby!" cried Stella. "Think when it grows up!"

"That's the trouble with you always, Stella," said Winnie. "You're always living the life that's past or the life that's to come, when maybe you and the baby will be in your grave. Every time I talk to you off you go like a Third Avenue melodrama. You tell me I've no sympathy for you, and I've got all the sympathy in the world. I try to tell you that if I were in your shoes I'd have sympathy for myself, but you won't listen. The only sympathy you've got is for that lout of a fellow."

Stella brought the baby to me and laid it tenderly in

my lap. "I'll depend on you to like it, Frizzie," she said. "Couldn't you love it?"

I saw her wistful longing, and I lifted the baby and kissed it on both cheeks.

"I will love it, Stella," I said fervently, and the girl beamed upon me. She drew back and brushed her hair and her forehead languidly with her hand.

"Now, Winnie, I've got some one to help me against you," she said. Winnie sprang up and pressed the baby's face in her hands.

"Bless your little heart," she said, "I hope you won't grow up to be as foolish as your mother."

Mrs. Caine called at that moment, and we filed back to the dining-room, more cramped even than the parlor, and feasted on an egg apiece, dry toast and coffee without milk.

"There's not much grandeur in living here," said Winnie, indicating with a smiling glance the dull red burlap on the walls, the half-curtain on the window, the linoleum on the floor, the four oak chairs and the square oak table, at which we sat. "We're crammed tight as sardines in these flat-houses," added Winnie. "If you were hungry you could reach an arm into the dining-room of the flat across the air-shaft and help yourself off the table."

"You ought to be thankful we're not on the first floor, Winnie, where they have to burn the gas for light all day," reproved Mrs. Caine.

"I'm not complaining, mother," said Winnie. "You know these flats are swell compared to the flats down in the real East Side. There they have rooms without a window, and, anyhow, we get a smell of fresh air here."

"I think it's very nice," I said.

"There are only about three million people in New

York living like this," said Winnie. "A foreigner coming here might think we've as little room in this country as the Dutch." She pushed back her chair and got to her feet. "With that I'll leave you all," she said. "I'm the best part of an hour past my time as it is."

"Where are you going, Winnie?" I asked.

"To work," she replied. "To work—thank heaven, when everything else fails me I can work. I'm the cashier in a grab-your-food-and-run restaurant, Frizzie—where they come in to luncheon on one breath, eat, drink, tip, pay the pretty cashier and exit on the next."

"Be off with you, Winnie," commanded her mother good-naturedly. "You've got too much to say for a girl of your age."

"All right, mother," said Winnie. "I'll shut up, and then there won't be a word spoken in this house. Good-by, old grumpies!" She tossed her head in mock indignation, and on her way out turned at the door. "Stella, I've got just one word of advice for you: Don't take Frizzie off in a corner and give her a headache with your tale of woe. You ought to say skiddoo to that rainy-day disposition of yours."

"I'll try, Winnie," said Stella.

"I would if I were you," replied Winnie. "So long."

"Bless that girl, Winnie," said Mrs. Caine, as we heard the door close, "she's the plague of my life with her talking, but I wouldn't change her for the world. I only hope some man doesn't marry her and crush the spirit out of her."

"No one ever will do that, mother," said Stella.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Caine. "Every girl thinks that before she's married—there's yourself, Stella. But we won't talk about that. Come, Frizzie, and I'll show you your room."

She led the way through a swinging door into the kitchen and on into a tiny room with the window showing on the rear of another flat-house, with fire-escapes and clotheslines breaking the narrow alley.

"This was Stella's room before she married," said Mrs. Caine, "and it was waiting for her when she came back."

"I will not drive Stella out, Mrs. Caine," I said.

"Lord bless you, child, if you don't take it as Stella and I want you to, Winnie will make you. Both the girls spent the best part of a day fixing it up for you, and then when we heard you weren't coming Stella moved back in again. They enameled the bed, and they put that pink paper on the wall, and that dotted muslin on the window."

"They did all this for me, Mrs. Caine?" I asked deeply moved.

"Why, that's nothing at all, dear; if they hadn't done it, sure I would have done it myself. And you mustn't let on I told you, for they made me swear I'd never whisper it—but what harm is there in telling you about the goodness of my girls?"

We went into the kitchen, and Mrs. Caine drew me to her and bent close to my ear.

"If Stella wants to talk, promise me you'll listen, Frizzie? Winnie's hard on her, but she doesn't mean all she says."

"I will listen, Mrs. Cain," I affirmed, "with all my heart!"

"Thank you, dear; now run off to the parlor till I get something done."

I went slowly along the hall. It was good to think I had found that New York had a heart!

CHAPTER XXVII

STELLA was in the parlor, evidently waiting for me. I had only to look at her to know the reason for Winnie's fear she might burden me with her troubles. Her eyes were filled with yearning, and her lips twitched as if she was about to cry.

"Sit beside me on the couch, Stella," I said, "and just tell me everything."

"Oh, will you listen, Frizzie?" she exclaimed with a glad little cry, and ran eagerly to me. "Dot hasn't been very well lately, but she's sleeping now—and you will listen, won't you?"

"Yes, yes, Stella, I will listen," I said.

"Then I'll ask you just one question—you won't think it's foolish of me? Say you won't!"

"No, I won't, Stella," I replied earnestly.

"Were you ever in love; not ordinary love, but terrible, terrible love that changed everything, that made you so patient and forgiving and brave—brave so you wouldn't fear fire for his sake?"

I was pondering the question in silence and wondering what answer I should make, when there came a low, distinct knock on the door opening into the hall. Stella caught her hands at her breast, and her breath seemed to leave her.

"It's Andy," she whispered in a hushed voice, and put a hand softly on my arm. "I didn't expect him for an-

other hour. If I let him in, promise you'll never tell Winnie."

"I promise, Stella," I said, and she rose and opened the door.

"Anything up yet?" asked a man's voice.

"Hush, hush, Andy," said Stella, "there's somebody. Come in."

She led the way to the center of the room, and in much embarrassment introduced me to Andy Thorne. He was an undersized, narrow-shouldered, narrow-chested man about twenty-five years old, with his hair bare on top and parted in the middle; his face thin and pointed, and, I thought, mean. His mouth was straight across and hard and cruel, and his hands were long and lean and white and looked as if they belonged to a crafty, suspicious person. His well-worn tweed coat was buttoned tightly over his little body; his trousers were close-fitting, and frayed at the bottom over tan-colored shoes. His collar was ill-fitting and too high, and, like his red tie, showed the effects of wear. At Stella's bidding he took a chair, sinking into it as if afraid of himself; and finally settling with his feet close together and his knees touching. When I tried to look him squarely in the eyes he glanced furtively about the room. He seemed afraid to trust himself to speak, and I could not help asking myself: How could Stella ever love or think of marrying such a man?

"You needn't be afraid to talk, Andy," said Stella. "Miss Peabody has promised me she will not say a word to Winnie."

"I don't know about that, though," said Thorne, with an attempt at a smile. "Girls find it hard to keep quiet sometimes."

"I will not intrude, Stella," I said, rising.

"Don't go, Frizzie, please don't," pleaded Stella; and Thorne added: "Don't let me drive you away; I didn't mean nothing."

I seated myself again. Stella shifted uneasily at my side, but finally gathered courage:

"Well, Andy, I hope things are brightening?"

"They're not," he retorted bluntly. "I'm broke—flat broke."

"And there's nothing for me or the baby—not a cent?" asked Stella.

"How could there be a cent when I haven't a cent for myself?" replied the man peevishly. "Things couldn't come worse for me, and you and the kid are all right here, aren't you? I've been trying, but I haven't been able to get my feet under me since Wesson fired me. Damn him, he had no right to do it."

"Do you mean Roy Wesson?" I asked.

"Yes, I mean Roy Wesson; the fellow that gave Winnie a job and fired her, and gave me a job and fired me. He's a fine one, he is. But maybe he's a friend of yours?"

"We were friends," I said.

"But you're not any more? It's something new for him to give a good-looking girl like you the snake. Stella's been telling me something about you."

"You mustn't say I told you, Andy," protested Stella, as I looked at her in surprise and reproach.

"Oh, that's all right, I guess," he said. "I know Wesson and his friend Andrews, and the kind of curs they are. Many's the bet I carried to the poolroom for them when I was down there clerking for ten dollars a week, but that didn't keep him from firing me, or framing up a lie to do it."

"Something may turn up, Andy," said Stella hopefully.

"I wish something would turn up that I could bleed them," said Thorne, and with a malicious look of satisfaction at me he added, "Maybe something will turn up." He started to finger the rim of his hat on his knees. "I went the round of the department stores to-day, but they don't want any one that's without experience. As if it took experience to sell a yellow or green ribbon! I've been thrown down on that city job—the district leader was only stringing me. I've got no pull, and all he wanted was to string me along to election, when I might repeat for him."

"Don't lose heart, Andy," encouraged the valiant Stella.

"Oh, I won't do that, because I've got no heart to lose; it's all been beaten out of me. I'd like to help you and the kid, Stella, but you see how it is."

"Yes, Andy, I see how it is," said the girl.

"I guess I'll be going," he said, slowly rising. "You don't happen to have carfare about you, Stella, do you? It's pretty tough to have to walk like I do."

Stella rushed to him and put her arms around his neck.

"Andy, if I had it I'd give it, I'd give it to you—you know I would."

"I know you would, but what good does that do me?" replied Thorne. He made a feeble effort at a laugh. "But you mustn't pull a fellow by the neck like that—we're not married any longer. Let me go."

Stella drew back, and her face clouded at the hideous jest. She cast her gaze on the floor, and stood trembling.

"I didn't mean anything; you know I didn't," said Thorne.

"I know that, Andy," responded the wan little creature, and looked up with a smile. "You want to see Dot, Andy? She's sleeping for the first time in two whole days."

"Don't wake her up for me," said the father.

"We'll just look in, Andy," said Stella, and led him, despite his reluctance, to one of the two small bedrooms between the parlor and the dining-room, where Dot lay sleeping. They returned in less than a minute, and Thorne went away without giving Stella the kiss her heart craved. She stood in the window and watched him go up the street. Then she turned to me with a look of deep disappointment.

"He never looked back," she said, "but, Frizzie, you couldn't be hard on him like Winnie and mother?"

"Indeed, indeed, I could not be hard on him, Stella," I responded, with an emphasis that came without the least effort.

"Thank you so much for that, Frizzie. It was Winnie brought him here, and now it is Winnie is hardest on him. Maybe it was a mistake our marrying, but other people make mistakes, too."

"Yes, they do, Stella," I said, at the moment thinking seriously of myself.

"I don't know where Winnie met Andy, but one night when it was blowing and raining he came home here with her, and that was the beginning. He wanted Winnie, but she laughed at him; she snapped her fingers in his face when he asked her to marry him, and then he asked me. Of course, he didn't ask right off or I might have refused him; but he started taking me here and there and he was the first one ever cared about me and I got to love him. We used to go in the gallery down in the Academy of Music and over in the Fourteenth Street

Theatre, and the times we had! He never broke an engagement, not one; and he was always so nice in bringing me little presents, that I thought more of than big things. Mother and Winnie said if I would marry him I would marry sorrow, but that didn't stop me. We just went out and came back man and wife, and Winnie never said a word but got Wesson to give Andy that job. We had four rooms in the next street to this, and we lived there and stopped going to the theatres. Then the baby came and he left me alone with it, and mother and Winnie made me get the divorce. They did that, and Winnie says Andy drove me to it. Maybe if I'd held off, as I wanted to, we would have made up; but there was the rent not paid, and the furniture we'd bought on the installment plan was taken from us, and I had to come back here. Andy stuck down there with Wesson, paying me four dollars a week as the court ordered him, until Winnie was fired and then he was fired. If Andy got half a chance there wouldn't be a man squarer than him. I couldn't care for him more than I do this minute, and that's why I asked were you ever in love—in terrible, terrible love that changes everything."

"I understand, Stella," I said.

"I thought you would, Frizzie, and I won't ask you that question ever again. I shouldn't have done it; I know now it was wrong. Only—only it was because I was looking somewhere, groping around somewhere, to find one that might feel like I feel—and I've found you, Frizzie, haven't I?"

"You have, Stella," I replied, and without further talk I gathered her in my arms. She nestled to me like a forlorn child, and both of us found relief—well, I won't tell you how! When she raised her face it was filled with a look of supreme content, and I could only wonder at it.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WE were in the parlor. Stella was crooning over the baby. Mrs. Caine was reading "Advice to Lovers," by Beatitude Heartfix, in an evening newspaper. Winnie and I were seated on the couch.

"Do you think I will have difficulty in finding a position, Winnie?" I asked.

"You can take your pick," she replied. "You've only got to walk in and show yourself; if there's not a job open one will be made for you."

"I wish you wouldn't display so much bitterness, Winnie; it's enough to make me despondent."

"You'll be lucky if you get no worse than that," she responded. "Wait until you go looking for a job. Start out in the morning, and I bet inside two hours you'll have a dozen jobs offered to you and be asked out to lunch just as often. There isn't a bald-headed man in New York that won't ask you out to lunch."

"What am I to do, Winnie?" I asked, almost despairing.

"I'll tell you what to do: Leave the men in the offices alone, because if they didn't insult you they would work you to death. Leave the department stores alone, because you'd be asked to feed yourself, room yourself, clothe yourself and wear a smile nine hours long on six dollars a week; without time when you're behind the counter to figure you've got to slave an hour for car-fare to take you to the store and back home again. Leave

the doctors alone, because all you would get for ushering in consumptives and lunatics would be seven dollars for twelve hours, seven days in a row. Leave the restaurant-cashier business alone, because with the smell of steak and French-fried potatoes in your nose you'd be half-starved on nine dollars a week, without tips. There's just one thing you ought to do, and that's go as companion to some old lady that's got so much money her relatives are waiting for her to die; and who is wishing for one friend she can depend won't give her poison. That's the only kind of job for a self-respecting girl. There are a hundred things you might be—you might be a nurse or a stenographer or a manicure, but they all come to the same. Before she knows it the girl that works for a living has ugly hands and she's careless about her appearance, and the worst of it is she never seems to care. Some women are doctors and some are lawyers, but if all women were doctors or lawyers it wouldn't disturb Nature, not one bit. The only real job for a woman is a married job, and you'll get chances as a companion, Frizzie, you'd never get as a sewing-machine girl or a cloak-model."

"I know nothing about being a companion," I said, timidly.

"You don't need to know," responded Winnie. "If you can make a bluff at a couple of languages that's all you want. I knew a companion once, and she told me how easy it was. All you've got to do is to read to the old soul, listen to her stories of romances when she takes them out of camphor, cry every time she cries, and order the servants about haughty-like as if you were born to it. When you get lonely of the companion business you can come here and freshen up on mother and Stella and me. It won't take you long, though, to grab off some

nephew or other, and then come in to some of the old lady's money."

"I never will think of marrying, and that's final, Winnie," I asserted.

"You've got to be practical if you want to get on," she replied. "*You* won't marry! What are you alive for?"

"I won't," I insisted.

"Who is he?" asked Winnie; and then I became confused under her inquiring look. "Oh, I guess you don't need to tell me; but you'll get over Roy Wesson before long."

"Well, dear me," said Mrs. Caine, putting her newspaper on her lap, "it's wonderful the wisdom this Beatitude Heartfix has. She gives such good advice. Here's one girl writes to her and says a man that once was her sweetheart still kisses her when he's married to another girl, and what will she do? 'If he was a real man he would not attempt to kiss you, and when he tries again repulse him,' says Miss Heartfix, and that's what I say."

"Everybody knows that, mother," said Winnie.

"But that girl doesn't know," responded Mrs. Caine confidently, "and that's why I think these papers do a world of good."

The door-bell rang sharply.

"I hope that's not Thorne, Stella," said Winnie.

"I don't know, Winnie," replied the girl.

Winnie went into the hall and returned in a moment, and looked at me. "Did you invite Wesson here?" she demanded.

"No, no, Winnie," I said, excitedly rising.

"Well, he's coming up the stairs." She glanced out through the door. "Here he is now. Come in." She

stepped back, and Roy entered. "I suppose you two want to talk, so we'll get out of here," she said coldly. "Come on, mother and Stella, we'll get out."

"Don't go, Winnie," I implored. "You stay."

"Mother and Stella, won't you come," said Winnie impatiently, and before I could protest further she walked quickly from the room. Mrs. Caine and Stella followed her, and Stella closed the door. Roy shut the other door behind him, then stepped toward me.

"You're going to come with me out of here," he asserted.

"I'm not, Roy," I replied.

"Yes, you are—you're going to come with me."

"What do you mean, Roy?" I asked sharply.

"I mean that I'm going to have you even if you don't want me to; it won't do you any good to fight. Do you hear what I'm saying to you?" He moved closer. "I'm going to start right here; I'm going to kiss you for all you've done to me. I'll kiss you, you little——." He drew near, within a few inches of me, but I held myself rigid, although the smell of liquor was strong on my face. "What! You're not afraid of me; you dare me!" He raised his arms. "I'll do it; by God, I'll do it. I'll take that kiss this minute." I remained motionless, and he half-turned and dropped to the couch. "Oh, who wants to kiss a girl like you—standing there as if you were built of ice?" He looked up with a vacant stare. "Look at you! Ready to snap the nose off a man. What kind of a frapped creature are you, anyway?"

"I thought you said you would stop drinking, Roy?" I said, not without pity.

"Why should I stop? Everybody drinks—you'll drink with me yet, Frizzie."

"You make a mistake in thinking that, Roy."

"Well, I can keep on thinking it if I want to, can't I?" He rose slowly and gripped the back of a chair. "What do you see in this place? It's not good enough for first-class swine. You're too good for a cheap joint like this; you're too smart to sit down in poverty when you might be wearing diamonds. Oh, the diamonds! That was a clever trick you played me! It took me quite a while to catch on when Betty telephoned. She took those diamonds for a peace-offering; wasn't that rich? She thought I sent them, and I let her keep on thinking it. It pleased her, but there'll be no making up. I've cast her off and all of her stripe forever. I've cast her off for you, Frizzie. I would give up a shipload of Camillas and Bettys for a thoroughbred like you. I mean that; I've never had a chase half as exciting as this. Camilla and Betty have no imagination; they wouldn't do with the jewels what you did. If they got rid of them it would be in a pawnshop. They're common, they're vulgar, but you—why you're a gem, you're a duckydarling, Frizzie!"

"I won't listen; you must go, Roy," I said.

"You've got to listen to me," he said. "You've got it in your pretty head I've come here to lead you astray; to play the cat like I did when I engaged in that conspiracy with Camilla. I could buy Camilla any day for a dirty game like that, but I'm not buying people any more. I'm not trying to buy you or put a price on you, Frizzie. I'm coming to you now like a man. I know the cad I've been; but every man's got some cad in him, and I'm done with being a cad. I want you to marry me, Frizzie; I want you to marry me this very night. One meets a girl like you only once in a lifetime, and I'm not going to lose you. I don't care what mother says, and father will fall in love with you the minute he sees

you. You don't know father; he's got none of those aristocratic notions. It's up to you, Frizzie; will you marry me?"

"I will never marry you, Roy," I said.

"I won't take that for an answer. You're the first girl I've ever asked; I couldn't run the chance before because I would have been taken up. I waited for the girl, Frizzie, and you are the girl; will you believe me, you are the girl!"

"You must wait until you know better what you are saying, Roy."

"You're back to that drink question again. Don't do that. What man wouldn't take a drop when it looks as if he's lost the only girl that's worth bothering his head about? I wasn't square with you, Frizzie, but I'll be square after this. I thought you were out for a frolic, like all who take the dive into the White Light District, but I didn't know, I didn't know, Frizzie; and I'll give you that kiss to show you how honest I am."

"You won't kiss me, Roy," I said.

"Can't you tell when a man means it and when he doesn't? God, Frizzie, I'd give my right arm for you. Meet me half-way. Kiss me yourself, and say you love me as I love you."

"I won't, Roy."

"What right have I to ask you to do a thing like that? Oh, there's a lot of the cad in me, but there's some good in me, Frizzie; and it's the good that's asking you now to be my wife. Will you answer me one fair question? You will answer me. Say that you care for me, or that you don't?"

I faltered, and Roy drew near. "You can't look me in the eyes and say you don't care for me, Frizzie?"

I attempted to turn away, but he held me by the arm.

"I knew it, Frizzie." His voice was triumphant. "You do care; you do! What's the use of beating about the bush? You love me!"

"Let me go, Roy," I said, and he released his hold.

"You do love me," he asserted. "You love me, Frizzie, and I love you. I'll say it. I haven't been all I ought to have been, but that's past, and let us call it quits and start even. You'll be the making of me; I'll make you proud of me. We'll be married now; we'll send a telegram to the old folks and to-morrow they'll give us their blessing—the both of them."

I trembled in emotion. I tried to raise my eyes, but I could not summon the strength. "You do love me!" exclaimed Roy, and taking advantage of my helplessness he attempted to draw me to him. We struggled across the room, and when near the window I saw the door swing a few inches and the face of Prince Andrews appear in the opening.

"Mr. Andrews!" I called, and Roy dropped me and swung around. Andrews entered the room and closed the door.

"I thought I heard the voice of a woman in distress, so I just opened the door and looked in," he said. "I imagine you had better be getting out, Wesson."

"What do you mean, coming here?" demanded Roy.

"If I were you I should know when the game's up," said Andrews. "It always was your way to exercise your strong right arm, but you have found one young lady who will not submit to that sort of thing."

"Betty's told me all about the kind of friend you are," railed Roy. "You're not here because you've been invited; you're here because Thorne held you up for the address. I've found you always were a sneak with me, Andrews, and you're playing the sneak now."

"I guess if I was held up you were held up first; and we are tarred with the same brush, it seems to me," said Andrews. "But that isn't here nor there; the point is I am here just in time to keep you from trying to win, by violence, admiration for your manly charms."

"You're insulting Miss Peabody," said Roy, "and Miss Peabody is to be my wife!"

Andrews tried to maintain his composure, but failed. His face grew red in fury. "So that's what it is?" he sneered. "It's you that is the fool, after all, Wesson?"

"Take care, Andrews," said Roy, "remember of whom you are speaking."

"I'll take care," said Andrews, "and don't be afraid I'll forget anything. Maybe when she's your wife she'll wear a few of the diamonds I gave her."

"That's not true!" I cried, starting toward Andrews, but Roy restrained me with his outstretched arm.

"Let me settle with him," said Roy. "Now, Andrews, you'll have to apologize—take that back, apologize, or I'll kick you like a dog."

"I guess you've got too much sense left to try that," defied Andrews. "You want to know whom you're marrying, don't you? I guess if I were marrying I'd be thankful for some one to come and tell me the truth—if there was an ugly truth to come out—even if it did hurt me."

"You'll take that back, and you'll beg Miss Peabody's pardon, Andrews," declared Roy. "Betty told me of you sneaking around in the dark with a knife to drive into my back. I know you, and you'll apologize, or I'll do as I say."

"Ask the girl herself," said Andrews. "Ask her where she got those diamonds now."

"Roy, Roy, I sent them all to Camilla," I exclaimed, "and Andrews knows that."

"You do know it?" said Roy.

"Of course, I know it," he sneered, "and you know that the diamonds you sent her went to Betty. What's the matter with you, Wesson? What are you sticking up your nose at me for? What better are you than I? Where do you come in with a demand for me to apologize for what you've done yourself? You're a fine hypocrite, you are. The same shoe fits both of us, doesn't it? And I guess if you want the girl for your wife that's had diamonds from both of us you're welcome to her. Good-by and good luck to you for a charming pair."

Roy overtook him at the door, and sent him reeling to the middle of the room with a blow in the face. I ran to the other door and called, "Winnie! Winnie!" She came almost instantly. Andrews was whimpering like a coward near the mantelpiece; Roy was standing off watching him in rage and contempt. Winnie rushed straight between them.

"Now both of you get out," she commanded.

"You won't interfere between us," said Roy. "He's a coward!"

"I will interfere," said Winnie peremptorily. "If you don't go I'll throw both of you out. Go in the street and fight—and never show your faces here again, either of you."

Andrews slunk around Winnie toward the door. "You know what Winnie can do," he said. "Winnie will take care of you, Wesson."

"Stop that, Andrews," said Winnie. "Stop it."

Andrews opened the door. "I'd do anything to please

you, Winnie; you know I always would. And you see what it brought you, sticking to Wesson? But I guess it was just as well we never came to terms—Roy always said you were the devil to manage, and I guess that's the truth."

Winnie's whole frame was shaking with emotion. Roy sprang at Andrews with an oath, but the man evaded him by closing the door and holding it on the opposite side. When the door finally flew open in Roy's hands the ironical laughter of Andrews, as he ran down the stairs, came back distinctly. Roy returned quietly.

"Why did you come back?" asked Winnie, her voice very low, but firm and strangely calm. "You and Andrews have done enough, I think, and it's about time for you to go."

"It's all right, Winnie," said Roy. "Frizzie and I are to marry."

"You'll never marry while I'm alive to stop it," said the girl. "You don't think for a minute, Wesson, I'd stand by and let Frizzie throw herself away on you?"

"That's for Frizzie to say," said Roy.

"I can answer for her," asserted Winnie. "Tell him for yourself, Frizzie."

"I won't, Roy, I won't," I said.

"There's your answer for you, Wesson," said Winnie. "Now clear out."

"Frizzie and I would be leaving here together if it wasn't for you," asserted Roy in growing anger. "You've always been a meddler."

"Don't you dare say a word more about that, Wesson; I know what you're thinking."

"You're right—that's just what I'm thinking," declared Roy. "It's got to come out some time. Andrews spouted most of it, and I think what he thinks."

"You'll not go on with that, Wesson," said Winnie.

"Please don't, Roy?" I pleaded, filled with anxiety for Winnie.

"When you ask me, Frizzie, I can't," said Roy. "But let's get this thing settled. You'll go out with me, Frizzie, and we'll be married."

"You know Frizzie's mind, Wesson," asserted Winnie. "I've stuck by her this far and I'll stick by her to the end, and I'll not let you spoil everything for her."

"You want to force me," shouted Roy. "You want to save her, and you're a sight worse than the worst of them yourself!"

Winnie stared at him blankly, her face pallid. Roy smiled cruelly, and was the first to break the terrible silence.

"I'd hardly say that if it wasn't the truth, or if I didn't know what I was talking about," he said. "Andrews wasn't a liar, but I would have sworn he was with my last breath had I been left alone to marry Frizzie as I want to and will."

Winnie approached him with her hands held up in piteous entreaty.

"After all that has passed between us, Roy, how could you do that?" she said in a breaking voice. "But I was mistaken, and you know I only wanted to save Frizzie—when I wasn't able to save myself."

"Yes, you were mistaken," replied Roy. "You were mistaken, just as I've been mistaken in you. It's you that has raked over the coals. You played a Judas trick on me and I'm a Judas to you. We're quits."

"Yes, we're quits," said Winnie, sinking to the couch and hiding her face in her hands.

"I am ashamed of you, Roy," I said with much feeling.

"I couldn't lose you to spare her," he replied. "She didn't spare me, and you see how things stand now."

"I don't see how things stand," I replied, "except that I am terribly, terribly disappointed in you."

"You will thank me when you have had time to think it all over," said Roy. "We should have been married long ago only for her pulling against me."

"Married!" cried Winnie bitterly, as she rose from the couch. "Married!" she repeated, almost at the top of her voice. "I like that. Yes, you would have been married in the way that you would have been tired of Frizzie this minute, and would be boasting to your men friends as you boasted"—she paused, then shook her head determinedly—"yes, I'll say it, as you boasted about me."

"Winnie, Winnie!" I exclaimed in sympathy for her.

"I never boasted," defended Roy.

"No, no, you didn't," continued Winnie. "You didn't boast—you never did anything but placarded it just as you're placarding it to Frizzie now; and coming into my own home to let my own mother know about it; my mother who thinks I'd go to God unspotted if I died." She ran at him, her hands clenched and her eyes ablaze. "You won't do it. Do you hear that—you won't. If Frizzie wants to go with you, very well, let her go, but you won't come into my home and blacken my name before the only one in the world I had to turn to when you got through with me and I began to fight to get back."

"Winnie, Winnie," I besought her, "I won't listen; I won't."

"You've got to listen," she replied. "Do you want to go with him?"

"Never, Winnie," I said, with all the earnestness that was in me.

"There's your answer for you, Wesson."

"No, it's not," Roy said. "I won't let Frizzie stop in this place another minute. She threw over Camilla, and she'll throw over you."

"That's your game, is it?" demanded Winnie.

"It is, if you want to call it that," said Roy. "Frizzie wasn't to be caught by Camilla, nor by Betty and she won't be led astray by you. You won't put Frizzie in their class if I have anything to say about it. What better are you? You went the same pace, and you soured, that's all that's wrong with you."

"You wouldn't talk like that if you hadn't drink in you, Wesson," said Winnie. "No, you wouldn't. And if it came to a showdown I'd trust Frizzie to Andrews before I'd trust her to you."

"I will stay with Winnie, Roy," I said.

"You won't, Frizzie," said Roy. "She worked me, and she's only trying to get even now."

"Aye, I worked you, Wesson," said Winnie. "I worked you when you came and took me out of the chorus. I was doing you a lot of harm, when I didn't know you were alive till you came blinding me with your money. I worked you when you got me to turn my back on my mother and Stella, and got me to lie to them that I was out on the road with a show. I worked you when I sent them your money and wrote them I wished I could save more from my eighteen dollars a week. Oh, Wesson, you're a fine man standing there and saying a thing like that. I worked you when I found you'd gone cold on me, and I sat down with my heart breaking and swore to God I'd live after that so I could look my own mother in the face. I worked you when I wouldn't take money from selling the clothes you paid for, but gave them to girls who wanted to go that way, and gave you back

your rings. I worked you when I asked you for a job—and promised there never would be one to know—because I came home the same time Stella and her baby came home, and Stella and the baby had to live like I had to live and my mother had to live. I worked you when I let you fire me without going to your father and holding him up for what his son had done for me. Yes, Wesson, I worked you; I worked you.”

“Frizzie won’t let the chance slip to marry me,” said Roy.

“What have you got to offer that she should marry you?” said Winnie. “Your money—your money that’s your curse. That’s all you’ve got to offer, Wesson, and it isn’t enough.”

“I won’t, Roy,” I asserted.

“You’d better be going, Wesson,” said Winnie. “Frizzie’s not a fool like I was, or like Camilla or Betty.”

“I won’t go,” said Roy obstinately.

“Yes, you will. And never let whisky lead you here again,” said Winnie. “You’ve got to fight whisky before you think of marrying any girl. And I know how hard you’ll fight, and what will become of you.”

Roy looked at me entreatingly. “Do you hear what she says, Frizzie? Will you stand for that? She says I’m drunk. She says it’s a drunken man asks you. Don’t believe it; I’m not drunk. I was never soberer in my life. I want you to be my wife—I want you to marry me because I love you.” His voice held tenderness, and I was affected by it. “You will come. I have not been a saint, I know. I have been hard on Winnie, but you’ve seen the worst side of me, and we’ll start out now and I’ll brace up and you’ll never regret it, I’ll swear you won’t.”

Winnie opened the door and waited silently. Roy reached out his arms to me.

"Frizzie," he said, "will you take me for all the mistakes I've made, for all the wrong that's in me?"

I felt he could not have made a stronger plea. I was racked with anxiety and I looked beseechingly at Winnie. She gazed at me coldly and that decided me. I looked straight at Roy.

"I won't, Roy," I said.

"Never?" he asked.

"Never," I replied.

He went to the door and stopped.

"I suppose that's the most I can hope for," he said slowly and seriously. He waited a few moments, then turned to Winnie. "I won't ask you to forgive me, Winnie, because I am past forgiveness. But I'll do all that's in my power, and that is to say I'd rather leave Frizzie with you than anybody I know."

He passed out and Winnie closed the door softly. She crossed the floor to me, and caught one arm around my waist, and with her hand on my forehead upturned my face.

"You love him, Frizzie?"

I looked at her through blinding tears. "Don't you know, Winnie?" I asked.

"I know, Frizzie," she said, "I know."

"You love him, Winnie?"

"I don't, and I never did," she asserted. "I hate him; I hate him! And, oh, Frizzie, it's because of all that's happened to me that I want to save you."

Again there was a knock on the door and Winnie went over and turned the handle. Thorne came sidling in, his hat caught by the rim between both hands. A

gratified look was on his evil face. He shuffled from foot to foot.

"I wanted to see Stella, but you'll do, Winnie," he said, putting his right hand in a pocket and taking out a roll of money. He stripped off several bills and held them out. "I picked a fifty-to-one shot, Winnie, and here's a slice of it for Stella and the kid."

Winnie took the money, crumpled it in her hand, and threw it in his face.

"I know where that money comes from," she said. "Pick it up; pick it up and get out."

"If you don't want it I can use it," said Thorne. "I like money."

"Hurry up," commanded Winnie, and the man half-ran from the room as if afraid of her. "There's another kind," commented the girl. "Wesson with his millions; Thorne scheming for a dollar, and both the same with women. Oh, I tell you, Frizzie, men are fair and square with women!"

"How did you know about the money, Winnie?"

"Mother told me he had been here, and it wasn't hard to guess he sent both Andrews and Wesson."

She laughed with a lightness that amazed me.

"But here, what are we moaning and groaning for? Come, Frizzie, let's wake up, and go back to mother and Stella and the baby. Anybody would think we had the care of the world on our shoulders."

"We are very foolish," I agreed.

"Of course we are," she responded; and we raced along the hall to the kitchen.

"Bless you, children," was the greeting of Mrs. Caine, "but young people do have the happy time!"

CHAPTER XXIX

It was a week later when Winnie came home with news that filled me with mingled relief and delight.

"Do you believe in signs, Frizzie?" she asked, and I laughingly answered in the negative. "Well, I do," she continued. "I saw a white horse, and at the same time a black cat crossed the street, and that always means something. I think it means you're going to land in a comfortable spot, and I kind of think it may be with my friend, Mrs. Wroxley Hall."

"In the name of goodness, who's Mrs. Wroxley Hall?"

"She's a newcomer on my calling list, mother," responded Winnie with mock seriousness, "one of the most select of New York's old aristocracy, I'm happy to say, and a widow into the bargain."

"Some woman you met through a man in the restaurant, I suppose," commented Mrs. Caine.

"You've guessed it just right, mother," said Winnie.

"Well, she's not up to much, then," observed Mrs. Caine. "Any man that runs in and gulps things down and runs out again, as I've seen them in those quick-lunch places, isn't particular about the company he keeps."

"Well, whether they gulp or not," said Winnie, "one of them had time to stop and tell me that Mrs. Hall wants a companion, and wants one good and quick."

"I never heard of such a thing," said Mrs. Caine. "How could you and any man get talking about com-

panions for old women? You want to take care of yourself, Winnie."

"I can't begin to tell just how it came about or just how it didn't," said Winnie. "It's too long a story, but what truth is in it Frizzie herself can find out by going and calling on Mrs. Hall in the morning. The only question is: Does Frizzie want to go?"

"Indeed, I do, Winnie," I replied; and the following morning I went up the brownstone steps to Mrs. Hall's residence, in the Thirties, four doors from Fifth Avenue, and timidly rang the bell. A maid opened the door, and led me into a long narrow parlor to the right of the hall. In a few moments I heard a light step, and I arose from a chair as Mrs. Hall entered with a gracious smile.

"Please be seated," she said, and took a chair near me. "You wish to become my companion, is that it?"

"I should like very much to be your companion, Mrs. Hall," I said, "but I am afraid I never can please you. I have not a single letter; I have not a person to speak for me, and that is necessary, isn't it?"

"As a rule it is most necessary," she replied, "but what gave you hope to come to me, and from whom did you learn I was seeking a companion?"

I paused a moment, and then resolved to act upon Winnie's advice.

"Mrs. Hall, if you read the newspapers you may know who I am," I said. "I was engaged to be married, but ran away, and the newspapers had long accounts."

"I think I remember," she said. "You are a rector's daughter, from Long Island, are you not?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hall; my father is the Rev. Dr. Peabody, rector of Covey. He tried to make me marry against my will, and I could not do it and so came away."

"But you have not told how you heard of me?"

"Winnie Caine told me—the girl with whom I am stopping, Mrs. Hall."

"And who is Winnie Caine?"

"She is a girl I met when I came here, and who has advised me and taken me into her home, and been like a sister to me, Mrs. Hall."

"She has been a very good friend to you, and you are hoping I may turn out to be the same, is that it?"

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Hall," I said eagerly. "If you only give me a chance I am sure I shall please you."

"And if I should decide to give you a trial, of course you would inform your father and relieve any anxiety he may hold?"

"Oh, no, Mrs. Hall, I never could do that; I do not want father to know."

"Still, you could not wish me to be a partner in your efforts to keep away from him?"

"I never thought of that, Mrs. Hall. But in everything I am sure I have had right and justice on my side."

"And you never intend to soften even a little?"

"I don't know, Mrs. Hall; father has not sought me, and I suppose he does not care."

"Ah, I should not think that if I were you, Miss Peabody," she said with a strange softness. "You cannot imagine how parents feel toward their children. It may be your father has remained silent and not attempted to find you because he may think it is the best plan to bring you back to him. I am sure a father never would wholly forsake his daughter like that."

"You don't know my father, Mrs. Hall, or how hard he can be," I asserted, and she smiled at me.

"Well, I shall do nothing to-day, but I shall think it all over," she said. "Give me your address, and I will

send a letter to-morrow with my decision one way or the other."

She accompanied me into the hall, and herself opened the door. The light poured in, and suddenly she laid her hands on my shoulders and turned me half around.

"Just let me see what you look like," she said, to my astonishment. She laughed and after a quick searching look released me. "I have a great faith in my estimate of faces," she assured me, "and please do not think it strange or rude of me."

"I judge faces, too, Mrs. Hall," I said, "and I like your face."

"You have the perceptive brow," she laughed. "Good-by. To-morrow, perhaps, you shall know what I think of you."

I hurried to Mrs. Caine and Stella, and we three were greatly excited until Winnie came home. Winnie was too matter-of-fact—I must say that against her. She was always throwing cold water upon me. And she did not share our excitement in the slightest. It was into her hands the postman delivered the all-important letter, but still she remained exasperatingly cool.

"Open it; open it!" cried Mrs. Caine, Stella and I all together, but she dropped it on the table and placed her hand firmly upon it.

"Eeny meeny miney mo," she began, despite our protests. "Get the cards, Stella, and we'll cut them. I bet it's a tall, dark man, and you're going across water, Frizzie."

"Please, please, open it, Winnie," I pleaded, and she ran her finger across the top of the envelope.

"Thank heaven, it's not the nine of spades," she said. "Listen to this: 'Dear Miss Peabody,—You may call again to-morrow afternoon at three o'clock, and I think

perhaps we may reach an understanding.' ” Winnie threw the letter carelessly back on the table. “I wish to goodness I had learned French and a few other languages,” she said. “If I had, that letter might be coming to me.”

“She may not take me, Winnie,” I said.

“Take you?” she echoed. “She says plain she’s going to have you, and you needn’t bother your head one bit more about it. You wouldn’t expect her to put herself down plumb and square on paper, would you?”

The reason for Winnie’s complacency was made known by Mrs. Hall when I called as she had directed. She received me with much warmth.

“Before you come into my home,” she said, “you must know I was fully informed beforehand of your experiences. Winnie was here two days ago, and told me all about you.”

“Winnie was here?” I exclaimed in bewilderment.

“Yes, and she is a wonderfully persuasive talker,” said Mrs. Hall with a smile. “She asked me not to tell you this, but I insisted I should tell you now. That much is owing to Winnie no less than to you, and I am sure you never will find a more loyal friend than she has been.”

“Oh, Mrs. Hall,” I cried, “I feel so helpless. Everybody does for me what I want to do for myself.”

“It is so with us all, Frizzie,” said Mrs. Hall tenderly. “That is one reason we should be so careful in the choice of our friends. Our friends are the expression of ourselves, and had you been other than you are perhaps you would not have given Winnie the chance to help you.”

For all that, I was determined to take Winnie to task. I saw her that evening. I tried to be severe with her, but she pooh-poohed me out of it. I had to give it up; I could make nothing of her, and I leave it to you to circumvent her if you can.

CHAPTER XXX

Now we all are going to take a great, long jump! One mighty spring and we go flying over twelve whole months. Autumn has gone, winter has gone, spring has gone, summer is going fast—and here you land once more with Mrs. Hall and I in the parlor of the brownstone residence, in the Thirties, four doors from Fifth Avenue.

I have learned a lot; Mrs. Hall has been my teacher. I wish you could meet Mrs. Hall face to face. I am sure you would like her. She doesn't believe the sun loses color every day when it leaves Fifth Avenue in the shade. She belongs to an unobtrusive little circle, that values refinement above wealth. She dislikes publicity; she dislikes display—but I'm not going to pick a bone with the society that parades itself. Instead, I'll take Mrs. Hall's word for it that such society is not worth picking a bone with, and pass on.

It was one of my duties to sort and read Mrs. Hall's mail to her, and I never shall forget my agitation on that particular morning when I opened a business-looking letter and saw it bore the signature of Daniel Wesson. Mrs. Hall evidently observed my emotion, for she glanced at the letter and then looked at me curiously.

"Do you wish me to read this letter, Mrs. Hall?" I asked.

"Certainly, Frizzie; read them all," she replied.

"Mrs. Hall," I said with much gravity, "we have not

spoken of Roy since the first day I came to you a year ago, and this letter is from Roy's father."

"Perhaps, I should have told you," she said evasively, "that Mr. Wesson arranges certain investments for me."

"But this is not a business letter, Mrs. Hall?"

"Read it, Frizzie, whatever it is."

I smoothed out the paper, and in shaking voice read:

"DEAR MRS. HALL:

"Unless I hear from you to the contrary I shall do as you suggest and come up to-morrow afternoon. I believe you are right, and that it may be best to talk frankly and honestly to Miss Peabody. From all you have told me and from my own knowledge I have become convinced there is nothing for Roy but this union, and I heartily approve of it. I think there will be little trouble with Roy's mother, and I trust there will be no objection on the part of Miss Peabody herself. If she knew the feeling of the boy towards her I am sure all would be well. Roy is keeping his promise like a man.

"Sincerely yours,

"DANIEL WESSON."

I laid the letter on the table. "You have been leading me to this all the time, Mrs. Hall?" I asked, feeling I had a real grievance.

"No, Frizzie, I have not," she replied, "but you will see Mr. Wesson when he comes this afternoon?"

"I won't," I said sharply.

I arose and went over to the window, and stood there close to the heavy curtains, looking out into the street and nursing anger. Mrs. Hall came up behind me quietly, and caught my hand.

"Come with me, Frizzie," she said, and led me to the

portrait of a girl, looking out at us from a gilded frame, her face lighted with smiles.

"What is it you wish, Mrs. Hall?" I asked in a subdued voice.

"You see that portrait, Frizzie. That was a girl I knew. Long, long ago she and I were very dear friends. She was even dearer to me than a sister or a mother. Will you believe that?"

"I believe, Mrs. Hall, but where is the girl now?"

"She is dead," was her answer.

"Dead!" I repeated.

"Yes, dead," she went on. "Before you were born to all your great troubles, Frizzie, that portrait was painted. And the girl was happy then; just as happy or happier than you see her there before you. The world was all golden then. You know what I mean—look into her eyes, Frizzie, and you will see! When she was sitting for that portrait she confided to me she was deeply in love. It seemed then that to her had come the most wonderful of all loves—every love is the most wonderful, as it should be—but she made a terrible, terrible mistake, and she died—with me the only one knowing the secret."

"I could cry for her, Mrs. Hall," I said in my droll way.

"I know you could, Frizzie, and I cry for her sometimes. But not as often as I did. I have become a little resigned; but all that is left is a memory, and that is not much, is it?"

She slipped her arm around me, and I permitted her to take me close to her.

"That memory is a great deal," I asserted confidently.

"I suppose it is," she added reflectively, "but, Frizzie, you would never guess—that girl has her arm around you now."

"Oh, Mrs. Hall, I understand, I understand; and you don't want me to make the same mistake?"

"That's it, Frizzie; I don't want you to die in the same way; I don't want you to live to let yourself become a memory like that, however treasured a memory it may be."

"I don't want a memory, Mrs. Hall, but what shall I do? You know about Roy, and how could I ever—ever?"

"Don't think of Roy, think of yourself, Frizzie," said Mrs. Hall. "Why have you been growing in restlessness? Why have you been growing in discontent these last few months? Ah, Frizzie, if I know anything about the feminine heart and you will search your heart I think you will find the truth there—and the truth will be Roy."

"I can't; I can't, Mrs. Hall," I protested.

"We can't expect men to be as good as we women are, Frizzie; that would be asking too much," she said, "and Roy, despite all his faults, has proved himself a man, just as his father writes. Not for six months, Frizzie, has Roy tasted strong drink, and it is the thought of you that has been his strength."

"Thought of me, Mrs. Hall?" I cried.

"Yes, you, Frizzie," she replied. "It was on the promise of seeing you at the end of six months that he stopped, and the six months are up now and he says he has found them so good he will go on living like a man. Frizzie, you have been living for a memory, and so has Roy, and both of you should thank God you must not live your life out for it. You won't make a terrible mistake as I did; you won't deny Roy, now tell me you won't?"

The heart in me seemed shriveled up into nothing, or turned into tears or something, and I just broke down. For the first time I lost my self-control before Mrs. Hall,

and I blubbered away in robust fashion. I must say, however, my outburst was not altogether righteous, for mingled with the pious impulses were bitter, disappointed pangs that all this time these things had been going on without me knowing them. Finally I just clamped down my feelings with my will, and looked resolutely at Mrs. Hall.

"How did Mr. Wesson know all?" I asked.

"Roy himself told him everything," replied Mrs. Hall. "That night—before Roy asked you to marry him, Frizzie—he went to his father and confessed, and Mr. Wesson followed him and was waiting outside Winnie's."

"He saw Roy and he saw Andrews?"

"Yes, and he was here one day and happened to talk, and I remembered what I had read in the newspapers, and had him send for Winnie—and well, Frizzie, you can guess the rest."

"You did that, Mrs. Hall?" I exclaimed almost in anger. "You and Mr. Wesson and Winnie all were in a conspiracy against me? But why should you have been interested in me, Mrs. Hall?"

"Ay, that is easily answered," she replied. "What about Roy? Wasn't it necessary to think of him?"

"If you said plainly you didn't do it for me, Mrs. Hall, I should feel relieved. But I am vexed because of all this work by other people in my behalf. I am losing all my faith in myself. There is nothing I can do to help myself, or be independent as I wish to be. Winnie helps me, Mr. Wesson helps me, you help me; ever since I came to New York it has been the same—somebody or other doing the things I should be doing, working for me or working against me, and all without my consent."

"Some day I shall sit down with you, Frizzie, and tell you every little detail, and its part and significance in

the story," said Mrs. Hall. "But not to-day. I have not had time to get it in perspective yet, and I am sure you are in the same fix. At first Mr. Wesson was thinking of informing your father where you were, and you must admit now, Frizzie, that I served you when I convinced him of the futility of that?"

"Yes, you did, Mrs. Hall," I replied, "but there's the other side: I have been managed by you all. You started with the intention of keeping Roy and me apart, and when Roy grew worse and worse you turned to me in the hope of saving him. Is that fair to me, Mrs. Hall? And you have been guiding and training me, treating me as if I were your own daughter almost, so that if Roy and I are married I may grace his millions?"

"That is ungenerous of you," retorted Mrs. Hall with some severity. "Had I seen or felt Roy had passed out of your life that would have been the end, but you cannot say that Roy has passed out of your life! Why, Frizzie, I have seen it in you for months and months; do you think I could not see when I have been through it all myself? It is not what any of us have done for you, but what you have done for yourself. Can't you reason that out? The whole world may have its influence upon you, but it remains for you to express yourself. If your heart doesn't find expression in Roy and Roy's heart in yours then all I can say, Frizzie, is that Mr. Wesson and I are pathetically and criminally stupid."

A smile played about her eyes, and I was forced to smile myself. After all, what was there to be grave over? I felt like shouting. Anything but gravity!

"You will see Mr. Wesson, Frizzie?" asked the persistent Mrs. Hall.

"Gladly," I replied, and she gave me a mother's kiss.

CHAPTER XXXI

Roy's father was a round, pudgy man. His cheeks were florid and bulging; his mustache was bristling and reddish, against the tawny color of his hair. His eyes were gray, as the eyes of all great men are supposed to be; and looked straight at you and through you. He favored clothes of startling patterns; he wore thick-soled, square-toed shoes; every time he put his foot down he seemed in the act of crushing something. The floor shook under his step. His hands were huge, fat and hairy. His waistcoat from top to bottom stuck out aggressively at the world. His trousers were very wide, and they bagged at the knees, so that when he walked he waddled. When he laughed he almost bellowed; when he tried to restrain his natural boisterousness he showed he was ill-at-ease. He had to be himself or nobody. When he laughed with you or roared at you there was no mistaking his sincerity; when he banged the table with his fist he meant it; when he said he was your friend or your enemy he meant it with an earnestness of which you could not entertain a doubt. But the trouble with Daniel Wesson, I found out, was that most of the time his earnestness was without a conscience.

Quiet and an atmosphere of repose went out of the room when he came in. It seemed to me as if Mr. Wesson was one of those men who carry their business around with them.

"I had to hustle things a bit in the office, Mrs. Hall,"

he volunteered as he entered, "but I'm here on the minute. Never missed an engagement by a half a second in my life. Now I hope you have arranged our little business with the young lady."

"Here is Miss Frizzie," said Mrs. Hall, crossing the room to me near the window.

"No need to tell me that," said Mr. Wesson, bustling over and holding out his hand. I extended my hand timidly, and winced as he took my fingers in a hard grip. "I knew you, Miss Frizzie, as soon as I cast eyes on you, and I'll say I don't blame Roy——" I gave an involuntary start and he dropped my hand. "Well, maybe now I oughtn't to have put it that blunt," he continued after an awkward pause, "but anyway you know what I was driving at, and it's the truth."

"Yes, but Frizzie naturally is a little reserved," said Mrs. Hall.

"I know; I know," responded the man, "but I never was much for ceremony. You know that of me, Mrs. Hall; I've never been anything on this bowing and scraping business; with me it's set off the fireworks without any speech-making; and what do you say, Mrs. Hall, if we just let the whole shooting-match go shebang this minute and have done with it?"

"I think that would be an excellent plan," said Mrs. Hall.

"What do you say yourself, Miss Frizzie? Are you for prolonging the agony?"

"No, Mr. Wesson," I replied. "I wish it all over as soon as possible."

"That's doing business," said Mr. Wesson, rubbing his hands briskly. "Now the decks are cleared for action; and I'll just say, Miss Frizzie, it's become one of my pet objects to see you my son's wife."

I quailed under his brutal frankness, and looked appealingly at Mrs. Hall.

"Now don't go misunderstanding me, Miss Frizzie; when I've got a thing to say I say it, and then nobody's wondering what's on my mind or what isn't. There's nothing to be gained by beating around the bush, and keeping people on hot coals of suspense."

I could not help laughing at Mr. Wesson's flowery brand of speech; Mrs. Hall smiled in real amusement, and the man's fat sides shook in mirth.

"There's nothing like a good laugh for breaking the ice," went on the irresistible Mr. Wesson. "But that's past, and as I was about to say, Miss Frizzie, I think you and Roy would make a right smart, handsome couple."

"Mr. Wesson," I interposed, "does your son know of your coming to me?"

"If he did and he let me come I wouldn't ask you to be his wife," he replied. "No, he doesn't; and you're never going to tell him the big fool I've made of myself, either. It's just this way, Miss Frizzie, I don't want to let Roy meet you until I feel a sort of surety down in this old heart of mine. I have a heart, though you mightn't think it. You see, it's better to keep a check on Roy than to give him a free rein. Things have moved along pretty smoothly for the last half year or so. Mrs. Hall has told you how we all knew most everything about you, and it's worked out not altogether bad keeping you and Roy apart." He stopped short, and his breast rose and fell in a ponderous sigh.

"This is a hanged long speech for me, Miss Frizzie, I'll guarantee that, but I'll worry through with it. Now there's no use my trying to pull wool over your eyes and say Roy hasn't had a fondness for a drop too much. I

wouldn't put you wrong on that if I could, but the boy's got over all that. I made him swear he'd stop it six months ago; for six months after we took you away from him, Miss Frizzie, he went a pace that you couldn't call ordinary, but he took a vow and he's kept it, and keeping it feels so good he's going to keep on with it. How's that? Roy's as clean a cut fellow this minute as any young woman would want to meet, and you'll be proud of him, Miss Frizzie, and I'll be proud of you both. How's that for an old chap like me?"

"I am delighted to hear about Roy, Mr. Wesson," I said.

"Of course you are; we're all delighted, and you'll see him if he comes?"

"No, Mr. Wesson."

"Ah, Miss Frizzie, you said that with a blush. I wouldn't give a red cent of my money for a girl that can't blush. Blushes are what we old folks admire most, isn't that so, Mrs. Hall?"

"I believe so," said Mrs. Hall, with a sigh of resignation that was not lost upon Mr. Wesson.

"Well, there I've gone and put my foot in it again—talking of you and me, Mrs. Hall, as old folks. Excuse me, Mrs. Hall, I leave you out of it. But to get back to this affair; you may have guessed, Miss Frizzie, I'm not much of a hand when it comes to settling up a delicate job of this sort. If it was anything in the way of a stock deal, or a turn at cards, or laying a wager on the fine points of a horse, I'd be right at home, and all would be fair sailing. But on this transaction—why, do you know, Miss Frizzie, I'm so afraid of you I'm afraid to stop talking? What will you say to me? Will you tell me I'm an old fool and order me out of here? I wouldn't blame you if you did. But I'll tell you this, Miss Frizzie:

If I ever get out of this mess alive I'll never tackle another such job. It was easy enough to propose for myself, but proposing for another man, even for your own son—excuse me! But there's just one other word I want to run in here, Miss Frizzie: You'll see Roy?"

"No, Mr. Wesson," I said, "I think it is better for Roy and better for me that we go on just as we are now."

"Make sure that you mean that, Frizzie," advised Mrs. Hall.

"Here now, here now; this will never do at all," continued Mr. Wesson. "I'll tell you what we'll do, Miss Frizzie. Roy's out in the street in the automobile. If he knew you were here he'd break down the door to get in, and I'll just run down and send him up. What do you say to that?"

"Mr. Wesson, Mr. Wesson, you won't!" I cried, as he started toward the door.

"Oh, yes I will, Miss Frizzie," he sent back from the hall. "I ought to have sent Roy in the first place."

"Frizzie," said Mrs. Hall coming to me, "I will wait upstairs, and you do what your heart tells you—you will, won't you?"

"I don't know, Mrs. Hall," I exclaimed, "but you mustn't leave me. I can't face him alone."

"I wouldn't be so mean as to stay," said Mrs. Hall with a smile, and she gave me a quick kiss and almost ran from me.

I heard a footstep in the hall, and Roy came into the doorway.

"Frizzie!" he exclaimed, and stood silent and motionless.

"Roy! Roy!" I cried, impulsively starting forward only to check myself and stand tense and motionless as he.

I confess now I often had pictured such a meeting, and

always my fancy had told me it would be attended by wonderful eloquence. But here was the meeting at last, and the extent of our vocabularies were two words that must mean the veriest commonplaces to all save ourselves. Yet volumes could not mean more than they meant to Roy and to me. I ask soberly, are there not times when speech fails as a vehicle for our thoughts? If you have been blessed with my experience, you will understand. If not, pray that some day you may know. Roy? Friend, reader, can you substitute a name and in it sum up all your life, or all eternity?

But I am wandering now, or is it that I am dreaming? Perhaps the influence of that meeting still rests upon me, or drives this pen at a foolish tangent. I'll quit this business of moralizing, and strive to be practical. I'll go on with my story, and let you know that for a full minute we stood there in suspense, and then—then the strain was broken in the only way possible. We ran to each other's arms. Yes, we did—just like every other couple since Romance began. For the life of me, I cannot remember what we said after that. I have a hazy recollection that Roy spoke about our having been treated as if we were children, but apart from that the minutes we spent sifted like a dream. Could it be that those minutes were too delicious, or sacred, or whatever you call it, to be tangible?

I came to myself when I heard Roy, in the hall, call his father. I felt a tremor of nervousness, but my happiness soon overcame it. I ran to the stairs, and saw Mrs. Hall peeking down from the second floor.

"I heard Roy call his father, Frizzie," she said by way of excuse, and I laughed at her womanly curiosity.

"Come down, come down, Mrs. Hall," I exclaimed. "There's news—good news."

If Mrs. Hall ever was in danger of becoming excited it was right at that moment. She hurried down, beaming, gave me a hug and a kiss, then cast me off quickly. Mr. Wesson was just entering the house, and she caught him by both hands.

"All the credit belongs to me," she said in unconcealed elation.

"I know that, Mrs. Hall; if you hadn't laid the wires just right in the last six months my bungling in the last twenty minutes would have spoiled the whole shooting-match," laughed Mr. Wesson. "But here, let me see my new daughter."

"Father, you're——" Roy had said when the big, good-natured man cut him off.

"I know, I know, Roy, my lad. I'm anticipating a bit, but what of that? What of that, begad? Come over here, my girl, where I can get a full look at you."

I followed him close to the window. He caught both sides of my head in his great, strong hands and upturned my face.

"You're a bonny lass," he said. "You'll be the making of that young scamp of a boy of mine. If it wasn't that I'm such an ugly old codger I'd plant a kiss on your pretty lips right this minute."

"I'll kiss you, Mr. Wesson," I burst out impulsively, and springing up I gave him a genuine smack. No sooner had I done it than I was ashamed and afraid of my rashness and audacity.

"I'm sorry I did that, Mr. Wesson," I said meekly.

"Haw, haw! Sorry? Be as glad about it as I am, and only do it again! That's just what I want of every daughter of mine. Nance used to do it until that French count came along and she got aristocratic notions. May might do it now if she wasn't so much for that Women's

Rights business. Never you mind, Frizzie; you just keep on as you've begun and I'll show you how your new, old father can love you."

He drove his hands deep into his pockets, and shook his wide shoulders.

"But here, that's not what I want to know—when's this wedding going to be pulled off? I'm all worked up over it already. There's some enthusiasm left in the old man yet, Mrs. Hall. All the heart in me hasn't been ground out on that Wall Street treadmill."

He stepped up to Roy and slapped him vigorously on the back.

"Don't stand there like a stick, Roy. Wake up; say something. Ask Mrs. Hall to tell you about the muddle I made of it when I stole your proxy, and tried to elect president, secretary, treasurer and the whole board of directors right off the reel—one, two, three. Wake up, I say! You've been going around in a poke for the last year or so, and now that you've got Frizzie why don't you start in and dance. Dance, man, dance!"

"That would not be dignified, father," said Roy, with a sly glance in my direction.

"Do you hear that, all of you?" demanded Mr. Wesson. "Dignified? Dignified? Who's got any use for dignity? Dignity's too high a horse for me ever to ride. Stop it, Roy. Be natural. Be a boy; be a boy. I wouldn't cross my fingers for a man who's not a boy when he's won the girl he's got his heart set on."

So Mr. Wesson ran on in his gay spirits, until Mrs. Hall quietly asserted herself. He was for telephoning word of the engagement forthwith to the newspapers. Further he was for sending a telegram on the spot to father.

"The newspapers are going to rehash that old story

about Frizzie's quick start from Covey," he said, "and the sooner we have it over with the better. Dr. Peabody ought to know about this; he ought to be asked up here, so that he and I can have a confidential chat."

"No, Mr. Wesson," said Mrs. Hall. "In the first place, I do not wish it and a few days will not make a great difference."

"That's a new tack for you to take, Mrs. Hall," said Mr. Wesson, "but I never ask a woman a reason for anything, and, anyway, it's you that holds the reins, Mrs. Hall. I'm not going to try again to do the driving. If Roy and Frizzie are willing, then I'm willing. But how would it do to have the wedding sudden-like and all to ourselves? That would clear me of the job of getting Mrs. Wesson into line, and you ought to be ready to help me duck that, Mrs. Hall."

"If you please, Mr. Wesson, it shall be as I propose," said Mrs. Hall with a positiveness that, in the end, carried the day.

CHAPTER XXXII

I KNOW that, by all the rules of "best-selling" romance, happiness should have rested upon the engagement of Roy and me. Wedding bells should have pealed in tune; orange blossoms should not have dropped a single petal. But I won't shirk my responsibility. I'm not a taffy heroine. This is an unvarnished record, and so let the truth be told!

Mrs. Wesson was not pleased; she insisted upon stirring up a fuss, and she was quieted neither by her husband nor Roy. It was her daughter May who poured oil on troubled waters; it was May who mollified the vain woman's disappointment. I found May to be a very sensible young person, practical and independent, just as Roy had told me. She took her mother in hand, and in contrast with the sorry failure of both Mr. Wesson and Roy, met little difficulty in persuading her that a marriage for love was to be desired infinitely more than a marriage for social position.

Mrs. Wesson was a business woman by instinct; it was second nature for her to be perpetually striking balances. She never credited anything to profit and loss. She knew what it was to struggle; although trying hard to forget the uphill fight of the first few years of her married life, she was unable to put the effect of them entirely behind her. Her heart was big and soft, but she had fallen into the habit of caring more for the opinion of others than for her own. She was a good but deluded

woman. She placed superlative values upon false, worthless things; she shut her eyes against the things which were real. It had been said of Mrs. Wesson that she once wore diamonds to breakfast, but I never could lead myself to believe that cruel report of her. True, she looked out of her element at all times, and never more so than when ponderously serious in lace-bedraggled evening gown, and arrayed with jewels like a Tiffany window. The sight of her on such gala occasions cured me of one form of incipient selfishness. If I ever grow old I avow I shall donate my jewels to charity rather than retain them to sully the jeweled dignity of a full measure of years! Old women, particularly fat old women, should not wear jewels. For proof, witness the capacious, cumbersome Mrs. Wesson offering herself as a bas-relief in precious stones.

It was a week before Mrs. Wesson expressed a wish to meet me. Mrs. Hall invited the family to dinner, and the recollection still is very vivid with me how Mrs. Wesson arrived that night. She was nervous and flushed; to be quite frank it seemed to me she was on the verge of perspiration. Mrs. Hall had an instinctive feeling for stage effects, and she had me stand in front of a blazing grate, where shaded candles on the mantelpiece shone over my shoulders and around my head in a soft, mellow light. She was very emphatic with her instructions.

"You must not move, nor betray the slightest anxiety to rush to her. Understand, Frizzie. Mrs. Wesson is emotional, and is not impressed by emotional people."

Mrs. Wesson entered briskly; when she saw me she raised her stubby, chubby arms with a quick little gasp. May was close behind, towering a full head above her. It was a moment filled with suspense, and as usual Mrs. Hall took the initiative. She did not speak. She simply

caught Mrs. Wesson gently by the hand and led her to me. The good woman did not seem conscious of Mrs. Hall's presence. She looked up at me with tear-filled eyes. Two great, round drops edged out of the corners and ran a close race down her cheeks, until she picked them off with the end of a white-gloved finger. She emitted a plaintive little wail, and reached up and patted me on the shoulder.

"I could forgive you anything," she said between sobs. "You are just like the ideal I have always dreamed of for Roy."

"I am very glad of that," I replied awkwardly.

"Oh, dear; to think you and Roy could become engaged without taking his mother into your confidence! But my mother's heart is big enough to forgive you both."

"Ho! Ho! That sounds well coming from you, Mary," rolled out Mr. Wesson, bustling into the room. "Remember how you and I got married? Just ran off without telling a soul, and look at us—thirty years gone by and the happiest old pair I know!"

"I'm thinking of that, Daniel," replied his wife, smiling. "Maybe, after all, we don't know what's best for the young folk. We're getting old-fashioned, I suppose."

"That's just it," agreed Mr. Wesson. "We've got to take a back seat and watch the young people frolic in the limelight. But say, where's Roy?"

"Here I am, father," said Roy bashfully, from a position near the door.

"I can see you're there all right, my son, but why don't you spruce up and assert yourself? You're the dullest engaged mortal I've seen in my time. Come to the front here, man, and share the honors with Frizzie."

Roy stepped forward timidly.

"That's more like it, boy," continued Mr. Wesson

cheerily. "Mrs. Hall, when are we to make this bit of information known to everybody? Now that Mrs. Wesson's one of us I can't keep it a minute longer. I want to get out and talk and shout about it. That's the way I feel. You know, I've only got my one boy, and no wonder I'm a trifle giddy-headed."

"Just a few days more, Mr. Wesson?" said Mrs. Hall.

"You'll excuse me, Mrs. Hall, but I'll be hanged if this isn't too much," exploded Mr. Wesson. "How now—why—what for should this be held secret another minute? It looks funny to me. Supposing somebody finds out? Supposing one of the servants here puts two and two together and gives it out? That would be like handing it on a gold plate to the newspapers, wouldn't it?"

I saw Mrs. Hall's face set in determination. "It must not be, Mr. Wesson," she said, "not for a few days at least."

"Why not; why not, Mrs. Hall?" asked Mr. Wesson.

"Because it is Frizzie's wish," replied Mrs. Hall.

All eyes were turned upon me. I could not conceal surprise, for Mrs. Hall had not spoken beforehand.

"It is your wish, Frizzie?" she questioned.

"If you say so, Mrs. Hall, it is my wish," I replied, not helping her in the slightest.

"That doesn't go with me at all," boomed Mr. Wesson. "Let's out with it. It's got to be told some time or other, and no time like the present. That old story's all to Frizzie's credit, anyway, and I'm not afraid of it. I never did care a fig for the newspapers. I'm ready, and you're ready, Mary?"

"I'm prepared for it, Daniel," said Mrs. Wesson, in a tone weighted with resignation.

"And you Roy, my boy?"

"I have wished it from the start, father."

"And you May?"

"I'm sure anything will suit me," was May's prompt reply.

"And you object, Frizzie, only because Mrs. Hall objects?"

"Yes, Mr. Wesson."

"You're overruled, Mrs. Hall."

"It must not be," said Mrs. Hall imperatively and with some show of irritation. Then for the first time since I had known her she betrayed embarrassment. Her confusion grew until her face was almost a deep red. Even Mr. Wesson had the instinctive delicacy to remain silent.

"If Frizzie does not object," she said at length, "I do, if I may. Please don't ask me why. I have a reason."

Her confidence was returning, and Mr. Wesson was kind enough to say, in his emphatic fashion:

"There won't be another word about it, Mrs. Hall. Your advice has been good enough for me, and we'll all follow you to the end. Isn't that the way to do it, Roy, my lad?"

He banged Roy heartily on the back, and smoothed everything with a deep-rolling laugh and the suggestion: "Let's all eat, drink and be merry!"

We went into dinner, and I was elated and proud and supremely happy. Even Mr. Wesson's repeated injunction: "'Ware of the wine, Roy," did not cast the slightest shadow over my real, positive bliss.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Now I am going to shatter your illusions; I am going to knock down the idol we have raised together. I shrink from revealing the awful truth, still, why should I? Surely, it was harder on me than it ever can be on you.

I soon came to realize the reason for Mr. Wesson's desire for a hasty wedding. More than that, I soon grew to suspect Mr. Wesson's motives. I found that Roy had kept his promise only in part. He was slipping back, and I was forced to the belief his father had turned to me as the only means of saving him.

Mr. Wesson deceived Mrs. Hall, and he deceived me. There was method in his strange actions; there was a plan behind his unusual talkativeness. But if he was to blame, what of Roy? On that it is only possible for me to ask the question: Can we women ever reason where our hearts are concerned?

Roy called one afternoon and I saw the telltale evidence in his face. Mrs. Hall saw it too, and the shock to her was so great she hurriedly left the room. I was silent in a feeling of shame. Roy tried in vain for several minutes to draw me into conversation. Finally he realized what my silence meant, and he walked over and stood before my chair.

"You know I have been drinking, Frizzie?"

"Yes, Roy."

"It's the last time, Frizzie. I swear to you—I swear to you on my honor again! Don't look at me that way,

Frizzie. It was Andrews. We ran into each other by accident. He asked my forgiveness for everything he'd tried to do to me, and I forgave him—I felt so confoundedly happy, Frizzie, I forgave him. He didn't know the reason for my happiness, and it was a joke to keep it from him. Now, do you blame a fellow? Andrews wasn't half a bad sort; we had a lot of good times together. But that wasn't it especially. We hadn't spoken since that night—that night when he dared to come to Winnie's and acted so—and, hang it all, I just did it because I thought when a man's going to get married he doesn't want any enemies. Answer me that, Frizzie: Now, does he?"

"I am sure not, Roy."

"Then you don't hold it against me. I said on my honor it's the last time—on my honor as a gentleman."

Impossible as it may seem, I was won to a little renewed faith. But Roy was weaker than he knew, and day by day I saw that Mrs. Hall was reading the truth of my grave face. Still she did not speak, but with firmness she opposed all of Mr. Wesson's impatience for a wedding. I began to wonder what manner of man I was dealing with. He came in one evening.

"This wedding's got to be pulled off pretty soon," he said, clapping his hands together. "I've got to go West, and I want to see you and Roy off to Europe before I start. The labor unions are up to their usual tricks; they've closed down a mine on me, and you can imagine how I want to get out there in the thick of the fighting."

I decided there and then it was time to speak frankly. I called Mrs. Hall downstairs, and she entered the room apparently prepared for what was to follow. I thought also Mr. Wesson knew the storm was about to break. He set himself with his broad back against the mantelpiece.

"What is it, Frizzie?" asked Mrs. Hall, putting the issue squarely before us.

"I wish you to hear with Mr. Wesson that my engagement to Roy is broken," I said bravely, and an ominous silence fell.

Against my seriousness just then was a wayward impulse to laugh. In the situation there was to me an element of the ridiculous. It was like a repetition of an old story. And so it was. It was a revival of a comedy or a tragedy, as you care to take it, with a new cast. I was the leading woman as in the first production, but even I was a new player!

It took Mr. Wesson some time to catch his breath. "What!" he shouted at last. "You won't marry Roy? What do you think of that for a good joke, Mrs. Hall?"

"I have expected it," said Mrs. Hall very quietly.

"You expected it?" thundered the man. "What am I up against? Tell me, one or the other of you? You know I'm apoplectic, Mrs. Hall?"

"I don't think you are surprised," said Mrs. Hall with spirit.

"I tell you I never got such a surprise in my life. What's the meaning of this? Who put you up to this, Frizzie?"

"I have decided for myself, Mr. Wesson."

"You have, eh? What do you say to this: The newspapers know of the engagement; I telephoned to them all. There'll be reporters up here."

I was unmoved. I did not care for that. I was almost glad. I often had thought of the excitement it would mean when the news reached the public. I had come to know that the New York newspapers love a millionaire's romance as dearly as a millionaire's divorce, and I was

keen for it. But Mrs. Hall was not anxious for any newspaper sensation.

"If you have done that, Mr. Wesson, you have broken faith with all of us," she said sharply.

"Oh, come now; come now, Mrs. Hall, that isn't the way to talk," retorted Mr. Wesson. "You can't go back on me now. It's you that's got to shoulder the responsibility for this—if there's any responsibility to shoulder. If it hadn't been for you I would have held Roy off, and he would have got over it like every man does. It only takes twelve months at the most to clear a man's head of any girl, and Roy had traveled six of them. If it hadn't been for you, Mrs. Hall, the boy would have reeled off the twelve by this time, and he would have been all right and ready for any old game."

"You know differently," said Mrs. Hall with much emphasis.

"All I know is that I'm going to stick by Roy," retorted Mr. Wesson.

"I, too, tried to stick to him, Mr. Wesson," said Mrs. Hall, "but Roy has not proved worthy of my trust."

"Ho, so you've come out of ambush, Mrs. Hall!"

"Yes, if that is what you call it, Mr. Wesson. I thought I was helping both Frizzie and Roy to happiness, but I was wrong and I will not stoop to deceit."

"That's a neat way to put it, Mrs. Hall, I must say," replied Mr. Wesson. "If you think that, I don't, and it's not fair to intimate that I'm up to a deceitful game. I've never done that, and you know it, Mrs. Hall; I've been free and aboveboard always, and every dollar I've got is a clean dollar—just as clean as the way I'm standing by Roy and Frizzie in this business."

"That is the mistake you make," said Mrs. Hall, "and I will not have 'business' applied to Frizzie."

"Ho! you want me to trade in romance and sentiment and all that sort of gush, is that it? None of that rubbish for me. You're old enough to know better, Mrs. Hall. It's not romance I'm looking for for Roy; it's a wife."

"You are not," said Mrs. Hall emphatically.

"Maybe you know better than I do myself, Mrs. Hall?"

"I think I do," she replied. "I think there is no more doubt that you are looking for some one to save Roy from drink."

Mr. Wesson grew white with anger.

"I'm not used to having my motives questioned like that," he thundered. "If it was anybody but you, Mrs. Hall, I wouldn't stand for it—not for a minute. You're ringing changes too fast on this case to suit me. You're accusing my son of being a drunkard."

"I am sorry if you interpret it so," said Mrs. Hall. "I am sorry it has come to an ending like this, and I trust you realize that further talk of continuing the engagement is not only distasteful but impossible."

"I won't stand to be dictated to by you, Mrs. Hall," raged Mr. Wesson. "What does the girl say herself? What do you say, Frizzie?"

"I cannot; I cannot," I said. "Roy was here to-day and he had been drinking."

"Think it over, my girl," said Mr. Wesson, his voice falling. "Think it over. What's a glass of liquor? I'll confess Roy is not a teetotaler, but I'm not, and drink's never made a slave of me. Not one man in a hundred is a teetotaler, either. Roy will never be worse than he is now; it's a thousand to one he'll be better. I've seen hundreds a sight worse than he is straighten up and stiffen their knees after marrying. You don't want a man, Frizzie, that's never broken away from his mother's

apron-strings. Roy's had his fling; every man's going to have his fling, and it comes better before marriage than after it."

"I cannot; I cannot, Mr. Wesson," I repeated in great distress.

"Frizzie will not be a sacrifice, Mr. Wesson," said Mrs. Hall. "Roy himself should not ask it."

"It's not Roy asks it; it is I," said Mr. Wesson. "And who's making the sacrifice? Roy could marry ten millions before this time to-morrow?"

"Oh, Mr. Wesson, don't say that," I pleaded.

"I will say it, my girl; it's only to your credit. It's to Roy's credit. It's to Mrs. Hall's credit. It's to my credit. It's to the credit of all of us. Mrs. Hall herself can't say I've been mercenary!"

"No, I cannot say that," said Mrs. Hall, "but it is not that question we are dealing with. It's not a question of money, but a question of Roy's strength, or Roy's weakness."

"You can't stop it now, that's all," said Mr. Wesson. "The papers will be full of it; they'll be on the street in an hour or two. It would be fine for all of us if they came out in another hour with the news it's all off. That would be a sweet mouthful for those Park Row scavengers, wouldn't it?"

"Frizzie will face it," said Mrs. Hall, "and I will help her."

"They'll have reporters down to Covey, and they'll take interviews with your father and young Clark. Do you want that? It'll be bad enough when they let their imagination run riot with Frizzie's leaving home and with what she's been doing since, without making it ten times worse by piling another broken engagement on top of it. You've got to think of my family, too, Mrs. Hall."

"Frizzie, have you the slightest desire this moment to marry Roy?" asked Mrs. Hall.

"There's the question put straight and square," interposed Mr. Wesson. "Now, we'll have an end of all foolishness, and I know what it will be; yes, I know."

"I will not, Mrs. Hall; I will not, Mr. Wesson," I said, and for the life of me could not utter another word.

In vain Mr. Wesson tried to shake me. He argued, pleaded, begged; he pounded the table with his clenched fist; he stamped to and fro; at last, ended with a bitter threat against Mrs. Hall.

"I've run your money into a decent-enough pile," he shouted, "and I've got my hands on it yet, Mrs. Hall. I'll give it back to you, and then I'll break you as easy as I made you—if you don't stop with this. I've switched around before for less than this, and I'll switch now, by God, if you don't get sense into your head."

"I am not afraid," said Mrs. Hall.

"What kind of a woman are you?" asked Mr. Wesson. "You're not afraid, eh? You don't think I'm in earnest, eh? Well, I am; and you look out. When Daniel Wesson puts his shoulder to the wheel it'll go round or it'll break. Now I'm going away from here, but I'm coming back. Yes, I'm coming back; in an hour I'll be here and Roy will be with me and we'll see how this thing's coming out."

He went away without another word, grabbing his hat, and pounding in furious determination down the steps to the street.

"Do you think Mr. Wesson would dare to harm you, Mrs. Hall?" I asked fearfully.

"No, no," she replied. "Mr. Wesson never would talk like that if he did not know in his heart that all the odds are against him."

CHAPTER XXXIV

TRUE to his word Mr. Wesson returned within the hour; and with him came Mrs. Wesson and May and Roy. Mrs. Wesson entered first, and flopped down heavily into an armchair. May followed her mother closely, her face unusually grave, and placed herself beside the mantelpiece. Mr. Wesson half pushed Roy to the middle of the room.

"Here's the culprit," he said, attempting jollity.

"Don't do that, father," rebuked Roy peevishly.

"Now what's wrong with the boy?" asked Mr. Wesson.

"Nothing's wrong, father," retorted Roy, "only I want to be left alone, and not handled roughly like that."

May Wesson saw as I saw, and her heart went out in sympathy. She went to Roy and placed her hand affectionately upon his shoulder. "Never mind, Roy, whatever happens you and I will stick together."

"What's the meaning, sister?" asked Roy. "Of course, we'll stick together; we've always stuck together."

Mrs. Wesson, with difficulty, half-straightened up in the arm-chair. "I can't see why there should be any difference of opinion," she said placidly. "I thought it was all arranged."

"So did I," said Mr. Wesson.

"And so did I," said Roy, "but Frizzie's got more sense than all of us put together. You may blame her, father, but I don't; upon my word, I don't!"

"Is that the gratitude I am to expect from you, sir?" said Mr. Wesson. "Go into the other room and wait there till I send for you."

Roy seemed inclined to bid defiance. But after a moment's hesitation he laughed aloud.

"I guess I won't rear on my hind legs, dad. You've got your riding clothes on, haven't you? Not a word now; not a word. I'll go; I'll obey you—I'll clear out, dad, and leave you to get such a whipping as you never got down in the Street."

Roy walked unsteadily to the door leading back to the dining-room, and turned with his hand on the handle.

"There's no one wiser to Wall Street than you, dad, but there's lots of things Wall Street doesn't know. Just keep that in mind, dad, and just call me when you're whipped good and proper—I want to see how you look when the lash has been laid on you a few times. So long, dad," and Roy swung the door with a bang behind him.

"Where did Roy ever hear such a vulgarism as 'good and proper'?" asked Mrs. Wesson, but no heed was paid to her.

"Well, Frizzie," began Mr. Wesson, "it's come to a showdown, and I'll play fair. My hand's not very strong, and I'll only play it for just what it's worth. First of all, I'll clear up a point. There's nothing like the truth, and I did try to deceive you and Mrs. Hall. Nobody knows about the engagement, and that was a bluff. I was thinking I could have telephoned to the newspapers when I left here and neither of you would have been a bit the wiser, but I'm going to be on the level. If it wasn't for that I wouldn't have come back as I said I would. If I was for going on dealing from the bottom of the pack I would have waited until Roy sobered up. You see him now, and you see how square I am with you.

He's not drunk; he's never been what you could call downright drunk, but he's been drinking. He's got the smell of it on him——"

"Why, Daniel, what are you saying?" asked Mrs. Wesson half-rising in astonishment.

"Mary, you must be silent," commanded Mr. Wesson, and his wife dropped back again. "I did wrong. I ought to have taken you into my confidence, Frizzie. I ought to have confided in Mrs. Hall. But Mrs. Hall and I did talk; we thought Roy would hold himself up, and then we made plans together. He held himself up for a while; when he began to slip again I tried to keep it quiet. I did what I thought was best. Roy's my only boy. When it comes down to it, what else is there in the world for me but what lies before him?"

"You have two daughters, Daniel," said Mrs. Wesson.

"Will you please let me speak, Mary?" asked her husband sternly. May crossed the room, and put her arm around her mother's neck. "It's all right, mother," she said soothingly. "We shall both listen quietly."

"I bungled everything," continued Mr. Wesson, "but I did it for Roy's sake. The boy's different to me. If he'd put himself down to work in the office there would have been no trouble, and all his mother's ambitions for him would have been realized."

"My ambitions, Daniel!"

"Hush, hush, mother," said May, drawing her mother's head close to her shoulder.

"There's not a better boy in the world," said Mr. Wesson, not minding the interruption, "and, Frizzie, I'll say you're the only girl I've ever known I'd trust him to."

There was a silence, and I asked myself, was there a heart in Mr. Wesson, after all?

"It's plain to see how I stood," he went on. "Roy was

getting away from me. I couldn't hold him. His mother brought scores of girls to the house, but he was only polite to them."

"You mustn't say that, Daniel," exclaimed Mrs. Wesson.

"I will say it," replied her husband. "There's got to be an understanding before we go any further. It's got to be known why I've been so set on this. It's not usual to insist as I've been insisting, when a young lady puts her foot down as Frizzie has hers. I want it to be known, and no mistake about it, that Frizzie's the only one who ever has interested Roy; and if he's ever going to pull up and make a man of himself you've got to marry him, Frizzie."

"Daniel, I won't listen to such talk," interposed Mrs. Wesson. "One would think my son——"

"Mary!" said Mr. Wesson imperatively, and she subsided. He leaned across a low, round table toward me. "You've got to marry him, Frizzie, if he's ever going to amount to anything. I don't ask you to sacrifice yourself, as Mrs. Hall was saying. The boy only wants somebody to steer him. He's a boy any girl might be proud of; he's got more and finer brains than I've got. I can't manage him and his mother can't. He's got to have some one like himself, some one that's got his imagination and that's stronger than he is, or he'll go down. If he hadn't any imagination, and wasn't always living with his head in the clouds, he wouldn't be thinking of you, Frizzie; he'd be content to marry money; he'd be blinded by the glamour of the thing they call society, but as it is he sees that society's all shoddy and a yard wide. Do you know what I mean, Frizzie?"

"I think I do, Mr. Wesson," I replied.

"You know I'm selfish only to see my boy happy and

a credit to my name?" he continued. "Of course, I'm selfish—Roy is my son. But I'm not asking you to throw your life away, Frizzie. I've seen all along that you can wind him around your finger; he's one of the men that only one woman can influence, and it's up to you, Frizzie. I'd lay a million dollars he'll be a man when he's got something to live for. You don't believe that, Frizzie? Well, I'll tell you something: I was the same myself when I was Roy's age, and you see me now."

"What's that, Daniel?" asked Mrs. Wesson.

"You never knew, Mary," he answered. "When you met me I'd put the brakes on, and I've never had any trouble about it since. It will be the same with Roy. When he feels solid ground under his feet he'll brace up. Now tell me what you're thinking, Frizzie?"

He was motionless, looking intently at me. I looked at Mrs. Hall, but her face did not relax its seriousness.

"I'm waiting for your answer, Frizzie," said Mr. Wesson, but it was destined that an answer never should be required of me.

Roy burst into the room, kicking the door wide open before him.

"Here I am," he shouted ironically, and in a voice that chilled me. "Here I am, ready for the wedding." He reeled to the small round table, and gripped it so strenuously that a vase went in pieces to the floor. "So, father, you see what it's come to," he called, as we looked at him in horror. "I got a decanter in there, and I emptied it. I got a paste-pot in there, and I had a sheaf of bills in my pocket, and look at me!"

Not a word was spoken. The only sound was a strained cry of affright from Mrs. Wesson.

"Look at me, dad!" cried Roy. "Look at me! I'm your work. I'm decorated in the colors you like best—

green and yellow, they're your colors, dad! Say you like me; say I'm pretty. I've got your money all over me—look at me! Money's the sign of the cross for me! I've got yellowbacks and greenbacks plastered all over me—five-dollar, ten-dollar, twenty-dollar, and fifty-dollar bills—and all of them from you, dad."

He reeled close to his father.

"Look, dad; don't you admire me? Don't you admire the work of art you've made of me? How do I look in the Joseph's coat you've given me? Don't you think I'm a great artist? I didn't need to look in the mirror in the back of the sideboard in there—I could have stuck them on in the dark. I could, dad—I can tell money with my eyes shut! Look at this, dad—my dad! I've got four fifties on my hair for a cap. Oh, they're not a cap; they're a crown—a crown of money, dad! Ha, ha! You never thought what my imagination was equal to. You have no imagination, dad. Look at the twenties on my cheeks. Look at the twenty laid square across my forehead—that's Cain's mark, dad! Just think of it—a twenty-dollar bill for Cain's mark on my forehead! Well, it serves, doesn't it? Look on my shoulders and on my chest and on my sleeves and on my hands—all money! Oh, it was fun sticking them on. I was for having a bonfire on the dining-room table first; I was for bringing you in, dad, and showing you the ashes and saying they were the ashes of the life you gave me—but that wouldn't have been half the fun this is; there's no fun in being melodramatic. And, dad, do you know how I got these five-dollar bills on the backs of my hands? Oh, that was fine—I plastered them flat with the brush and I rolled my hands on them on the table, dad,—on the table! You like me looking this way, don't you? Money on my hands and my arms and my shoulders and my chest and

my head and my forehead and my cheeks—on my cheeks! Smite me on the right cheek, dad, and I'll turn the left cheek for you to smite again. Isn't that what the Bible says? Yes, that's what the Bible says, but it isn't what you've been telling me since I was knee high, dad. No, it isn't; you've been telling me to smite you on the pocket-book, and I've done it and now you've got to pay, dad; you've got to pay."

Roy's eyes were staring, his whole appearance was terrifying. Across his breast the bills were laid on two deep. Mr. Wesson was the first to recover from the shock. He faced his son aggressively.

"You've got to come home with me, Roy, and at once," he said.

"That's the first time you've ever said that to me, dad," railed Roy. "Where's home?"

"You must not say another word, sir," ordered Mr. Wesson.

"What!" cried Roy. "Not talk? Who said that? Was it my own father? I thought he wanted to hear me talk; I thought I couldn't talk enough to please him; I thought I had to show him how smart I am. Oh, no, dad, you won't stop me talking now. Do you hear that—you won't! It's harvest-time now, dad; the liquor you invested in is coming back to you with interest. Say, dad, will you ever take me on your knee again and let me sip the last drops out of your cocktail glass? You remember you used to do that, and laugh and tell mother there never was a Wesson disgraced himself by too much drinking. But that's past; you've disgraced the line in me, dad. That's what you've done. You're getting it now for the free hand you gave me. The chickens have come home to roost; that's what it amounts to, dad."

"You must come with me, Roy," said his father in a placating tone.

"I'll never go with you, dad; I'll go with mother."

Mrs. Wesson emitted a sharp cry of pain, and Roy looked at her.

"I'll go with you mother—mother, that's always been so gentle and generous with me, and that's never believed her boy could do wrong. We will go together, mother, won't we? You've been an easy mother; never let father cross me or box my ears or anything like that; never got up in your indignation when he held a cocktail glass to my lips; never made me do anything I didn't want to do! You've been a loving mother to me always."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Roy," said Mrs. Wesson, and with anguish in her voice, added: "But Roy, Roy, I never trained you to this!"

"Trained, mother! Trained! That's rich—but, of course! You and father trained me, mother; yes, yes, you did, you trained me up in the way I should go!"

He went to her chair and put his hands on her gray hair.

"But it's not you that's to blame, mother; no, no, it's not you. It's father; it's father that's got to pay the piper."

Mr. Wesson crossed over and took his son firmly by the arm.

"You'll come with me, Roy; you'll come straight to the automobile and home."

Roy wrenched himself free.

"There's one thing first," he cried.

He came before me and took me by both hands.

"Frizzie, look at me," he said, but I had not courage to raise my head. "Look up, Frizzie," he commanded, and I slowly raised my eyes to his. "Thank God, Friz-

zie, it's stopped short at this. You're worth a hundred of me. Go back to Norman Clark. He's worth a thousand of me. I've been a cad to you always."

"No, Roy," I said.

"Oh, yes, I have," he continued. "I've been a cad to you, but it's all over now, Frizzie, and I only want you to remember one thing: The cad in me was my money. It was money pulled me down. Money always got the better of me. I thought I could fight against it, but I couldn't. You remember that day on the knoll, Frizzie? You remember? When we saw Neptune in the sea, and the waves and the sun danced for us, and the breeze whispered mysteries into our ears, and we launched a shell for a ship, and we hoisted an ostrich feather for a sail, and sped away together in quest of a magical realm? Of course, of course, you remember! Well, that was the real Roy. That was the Roy who might stand before you now, if I was not my father's son. Good-by, Frizzie."

He bent down and kissed my right hand.

"Good-by, Frizzie," he repeated, and drew away leaving me standing helpless and forlorn.

"You will go now, Roy?" asked his father.

"Sure I'll go; but I'll go with mother and with May. Where's May?"

"I'm here, Roy," said the girl stepping forward.

Mrs. Wesson, sobbing bitterly, walked toward the door and May joined her. Mr. Wesson again took his son by the arm, and Roy looked at him curiously.

"So you're determined about it, dad, as you're determined about everything you try," said Roy. "But there are some things you can't do, aren't there? But go ahead; have your way with me; lead me out of here."

Father and son followed Mrs. Wesson and May out into the hall. There Roy looked back. With his free

hand he tore at the money on his coat, and sent a few crumpled pieces to my feet.

"Take them as mementos, Frizzie," he shouted, as his father dragged him away. "Take them—take them," his voice came back, "How could I build castles in the air out of stuff like that?"

Mrs. Hall came up quietly and led me to the portrait of herself as a girl, smiling at us out of the gold frame.

"You! You!" said Mrs. Hall, addressing the picture in a voice that held as much tenderness as reproof. "It was you influenced us to all this!"

She looked at me.

"Frizzie, Frizzie?" she asked. "Dare we ever again smile like the girl up there in the picture?"

"Of course, of course," I cried. "We will smile now, Mrs. Hall!"

"Of course!" she exclaimed gladly, and there the two of us stood and not only smiled but laughed. For there's laughter with tears in it.

CHAPTER XXXV

WITH some misgiving I went the following evening to call on Winnie, and she received me coldly at the head of the stairs. Not so Mrs. Caine, whom I found in the parlor crying as if her heart were broken.

"Why, Mrs. Caine, what is wrong?" I asked.

"Haven't you heard, Frizzie?" she lamented. "Poor little Dot; poor little——"

"Come now, mother, don't be so sudden," interposed Winnie. "You know you promised you would get over it."

"Yes, I know I promised, Winnie; but how can anybody forget?"

"Life's going to be awful dismal if you keep this up, mother; and how are Frizzie and I going to talk here with you in misery that way?"

"I won't bother you, Winnie; I'll go back and watch the stew on the fire. You tell her, Winnie, and then both of you come back and talk to a poor old woman."

"We will, Mrs. Caine," I said sympathetically, and I could hear her sob as she went along the hall.

"Tell me, tell me, Winnie?" I demanded.

"Dot's dead," she replied bluntly.

"And Stella—what of her?"

"Stella's gone back to Andy Thorne."

"She hasn't done that!" I protested.

"Yes, she has. They were married again when they came back from the funeral."

"I do hope they will be happy now, Winnie."

"Happy! I hope so, too."

The girl sat down, and made a gesture as if in resignation.

"You haven't been here for three months? Where were you? A lot you care about us, but I thought it would be that way. Well, no matter; what's the difference? One friend or enemy more or less doesn't count. But, oh, you don't know all that's happened since you were here last."

"Do tell me, Winnie," I said. "You're so cold you frighten me. Tell me about Stella and the baby."

"And about myself?"

"Yes, about yourself, Winnie."

"It's three months since you've been here, and the last word I had from you was the letter telling me you were engaged to Wesson. You wrote that the day you became engaged to him?"

"Yes, Winnie, that very day."

"Are you married yet?"

"No, Winnie; Roy and I will never marry."

"So you've got something to tell, too. It's broken off?"

"Yes."

"I'm not sorry; it looks as if things are getting squared up all around."

"Please begin, Winnie?"

"All right, I'll begin. First the baby—there's not much to that. Diphtheria. She was well this day—playing with me here in this room—dead the next. We sat up all night. The doctor used some newfangled remedy, antitoxin, or something or other, but she was dead at eleven o'clock. Maybe if we'd let them take her to the hospital she would have lived; maybe she wouldn't. Anyway she's dead."

"Oh, Winnie, I can't bear to hear you talk like that."

"Well, that's how I feel—what had she to be taken from us for? What harm was she doing? We were happy. One might think God doesn't want poor people to be happy. But she's gone. The funeral was the day after she died—they wouldn't let us keep her a day longer. Stella and Andy Thorne rode to the cemetery together; they rode back together; they went away together. Stella came here alone two hours later and showed the marriage certificate. She couldn't speak, and mother cried over her."

"And you, Winnie?"

"I didn't cry. I told her if I'd been in her place I might do the same, and I kissed her."

"You kissed her, Winnie?" I cried in gladness.

"She's my sister," she replied. "They're living over in Jersey City. Thorne wanted to take her as far as he could from me. Not that I ever did anything to him. He's got some money. He's doing something in a pool-room; when the horse-racing shuts down for the winter I suppose Stella will be back here again. She was here yesterday, and her cheek was black. But she was smiling, and she said she was happy. Maybe she was."

"I am sure she is happy," I said.

"Do you know what happened to Betty Collins?" she asked.

"No."

"She shot herself."

"Winnie!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, shot herself. You might have read it in the papers. Where were you? Didn't you see the pictures?"

"No."

"Maybe Mrs. Hall kept the papers from you. I told Mrs. Hall all about Betty and the rest of them. I'll bet

she saw. I'll bet old Wesson saw, too, and that he put her up to keeping the papers away. I know what he is; he's smart and tricky, but he'd do better if he was honest."

"But Betty?" I asked impatiently.

"Oh, she just dressed herself in her best evening gown and put on all her jewels and lay down on a couch with a photograph of Roy Wesson in one hand and a revolver in the other. In the morning her maid found her as if she was asleep, only for a hole in her temple. She's lucky."

"Winnie, Winnie!"

"I mean it. She's in heaven, if there's a heaven anywhere. She never hurt anybody but herself, and she couldn't help that—nobody ever helped her. Betty loved Roy Wesson to the last, too; she loved him as well as she could."

"You must not say that, Winnie," I cried.

"No? Andrews soon threw her over, once you were out of his net. When she had time to think she must have thought of Wesson. If the minds of us women didn't run back we'd be happier. But no matter; she's gone. Maybe you've heard of Camilla Delmont?"

"No; what happened to her, Winnie?"

"They kept that from you, too? Camilla's not dead—no fear of her shooting herself. She's too wise. She held up Andrews. She brought a breach-of-promise suit against him. He paid forty thousand dollars to keep it out of court. She had his letters, and she let him off easy. She's gone to what she calls her home in a village in Jersey. She won't be there long."

"I never thought you could be so terribly hard, Winnie?"

"I'm terrible, am I? You haven't heard about myself?"

"How could I, Winnie?"

"I might have known that; you couldn't. I was engaged. Yes, engaged. And to as fine a fellow as ever walked this earth on two feet. Only a boss plumber, but good enough for me. I don't know how it came about. I couldn't help it. If I hadn't had time to think it all over after I'd given my promise, maybe I'd be married now. He wanted the wedding in a hurry. But one night I woke up, and I lay there in the dark and that settled it. When he came the next night, I said: 'Frank, I can't marry you.' He asked, 'Why not?' and again I said: 'Frank, I can't marry you.' He didn't ask another word—Frank was a man. He knew what I meant, but that didn't stop him. He wound his big, strong arms around me. 'Do you think I'm a saint?' he said. 'Come on, marry me.' 'I can't Frank; I won't,' I said. 'You will,' he said. 'I'm the black one. You've been square and aboveboard; now let's start with the decks swept clean.' I held out, and he got mad. He said I was contrary. I held out against him, and he went away mad."

"He may come back, Winnie."

"Maybe," said the girl. "Maybe."

"He will come back; he must come back," I said.

"Supposing he does come back, what of that?" she said. "What about Wesson?"

"It was drink, Winnie."

"That's enough. I know all. Drink! When you say that you say everything."

She caught her hands in her lap and fixed her eyes on me. I thought I saw softness creep over her face.

"Why did you send Frank away?" I asked.

"Can't you guess?" she replied, all the harshness gone from her voice. "Can't you guess?" she repeated, and added: "Oh, no, you can't."

"I can, Winnie! It's because you love somebody else—you love Roy!"

"I didn't say that," she defended. She was silent for a moment. Then tears welled in her eyes, which before had been so dry.

"Yes, I love him; I love him," she said, "and you love him—and now where are we?"

There was another silence, and I could feel my heart beat. The hardness settled in Winnie's face again.

"What right have you to come to me?" she demanded. "What did I ever do to you that you should steal Wesson away from me?"

"Winnie, Winnie; I didn't do that," I said.

"No; you never thought, but that's what you did. Women are such simpletons till they're jealous once. You came to me and you confided in me and it never crossed your mind I might be finding it hard to keep from tearing you to pieces. What kind of a fool are you? Do you think it was out of charity I wanted to keep you from Wesson when you came like Smiling Innocence into his office that day? What chance could I have to prove to him there was good in me with you with your doll's face before him? And you wrote to me and told me you were engaged to him—engaged after all that had happened; after he'd tried to drag you down as he dragged me down and left me to fight my way up again! You've got a lot to be thankful for. You may thank your God you're not a suicide like Betty or a blackmailer like Camilla."

I cried in anguish. She waited until my emotion began to wear itself off.

"Crying won't mend it," she said. "I was as big a fool as you were. I thought I could appeal to the manly side of him by showing him my strength. My strength!

Think of that! The fools we women are! What we flatter ourselves we know about men!"

"Winnie, Winnie, are you going to turn against me?"

"I don't know," she replied. "I've been asking myself that question ever since I met you and I haven't been able to answer it yet."

"You mustn't blame me, Winnie; you mustn't. I didn't know."

She ran over and caught me by the shoulders and shook me.

"I don't blame you," she said, "but I've often longed to get my hands on you."

"I don't believe it," I avowed. "You directed me in everything."

"I directed you!" she exclaimed. "Oh, you don't see yet. You don't see yet what it was saved you. Where would you be now if Betty Collins hadn't come back that day and talked the truth?"

"Winnie, I see, I see!"

"And you say I directed you! Don't thank me; thank Betty that's dead. It was Betty pulled you through, and not because she wanted to, but because she wouldn't let somebody else pull you down when she couldn't have a hand in it herself. You've never thought of it all this time; you'd never have thought of it if I hadn't showed you. The only difference between you and Betty and Camilla and myself—myself!—is that you weren't left to find out all the blackness of hell there's in it. Think of that, and don't think hard of any other woman!"

"I won't, Winnie, never, never. But you don't hate me, Winnie?"

"Oh, I tried to hate you, but I couldn't. I hated you and yet I liked you. Yes, I did; if I had only hated you right along I wouldn't have been contradicting myself

every day. But how could I hate you always—you like a lamb thrown out! I didn't know what I was doing. I got old Wesson to working for you; I got Mrs. Hall to working for you, and all the time when I was trying to hold you up I was wishing down in my heart you'd fall. All I've been through hasn't made me know myself, and maybe that's the only lucky thing about me."

"We're still friends then, Winnie?"

"Yes, we're friends, and that's all both of us have left. That's all." She reached out and clenched my hand in hers. "Roy's gone. He wasn't for me. He wasn't for you. We're here now at last, at last—desolate, the both of us. That's the end it's come to."

I started from my seat, and took my stand before her.

"I won't hear you say that, Winnie," I called. "We're not desolate. We're all the better for what has happened." I could see a look of amusement and surprise in her face. "Our hearts are not empty. They're filled with something more than mere selfish love. Do you believe that, Winnie? Mine is, and so is yours. Had we been weak we should have gone down with him. But we were strong, Winnie, we were strong. You fought a greater fight than I, but we've both won. We're victors, Winnie, victors, victors! Winnie, Winnie, can you believe, I feel like singing aloud in joy? For the first time I know myself, I know my strength; and you know yourself, and you know your strength; and that's all there is to know. Up, Winnie; up, Winnie, and we'll live! Live, live, live! We've just begun to live! We've just begun to know what it is to live!"

She smiled wistfully at me.

"I've been expecting something like that from you this long, long time—these months and months and months,"

she said. "It's true every word of it—true for you. But for me, Frizzie—well, you haven't paid the price I paid."

"I won't listen, Winnie," I insisted, "I won't."

She arose slowly and took me affectionately by the arm.

"What's the use in talking more about it?" she said.

"Come, Frizzie, let us go back to mother, who thinks she's burdened with the cares of the world."

"I will go with you, Winnie," I said. And we went to the kitchen hand in hand, and, strange as it may seem, soon all three of us were laughing together.

Blessed laughter, say I, blessed laughter!

CHAPTER XXXVI

FROM Winnie's I went straight to a telegraph office and sent a message to father. I asked him to come to me, and then I went home to Mrs. Hall's and to bed in a spirit of complete, wonderful content. At breakfast I told Mrs. Hall. She almost started from her chair in sudden excitement, but quickly controlled herself and settled down quietly again. She was strangely silent. I confessed I was filled with a desire to return to Covey.

"That was inevitable from the start, Frizzie," said Mrs. Hall, and lapsed again in silence.

I made another effort to arouse her.

"Do you know my most vivid impression of New York, Mrs. Hall?" I asked.

"No," was her only response.

"It's a city of fat women and fat dogs, that's what New York is," I said, but Mrs. Hall hardly seemed to hear.

Father arrived at three o'clock. I waited in the parlor, and an odd impulse led me to stand in the exact spot where Mrs. Hall had placed me for the coming of Mrs. Wesson. There was little change apparent in him. There was a little more white at his temples, a little more sharpness to his stern, unyielding features, and that was all. He was master of himself as always; cool, imperturbable, conceding no emotion even in the presence once more of his only child. He was the first to speak. I had thought of many things to say, but his approach almost froze me. It seemed as if the old hostility, the old pulling at cross-purposes, still remained.

"You have returned from the dead, Frizzie," he said; and the unexpectedness and shock of these opening words shook me out of the dangerous, destructive state of feeling and mind.

I went straight to him, and, although he tried to hold himself aloof, put my hands on his shoulders and forced him down until I kissed him. I led him to a chair and forced him into it. I drew a chair close to him, and in joyous exhilaration I spoke out of the fulness of my heart.

"I have not returned from the dead, father; instead of that, I have found the land of the living; and I live there, and I have sent for you to come and live with me! Father, I have learned the secret of our unrest. I have learned what it was drove us apart and now draws us together. Do you believe in Beauty, father? Oh, you must believe, for I believe! You will join in the quest of Beauty with me? I am going back to Covey. There's where Beauty lies for me now. Do you realize what I am saying, father? I am not coming back carried on my shield, but bearing it aloft triumphantly, as you knew I would."

"Is your Beauty selfishness?" asked my father.

"No, no; it is not that," I protested. "My Beauty is the expression of all my hopes and fears, of all my aims and all my struggles—the expression of my very self, father! My Beauty is the glory of content and of discontent; it is everything I have, everything I can hope to have. My Beauty, father, is my religion, because I believe it is God Himself. I see my Beauty, father, as something grand and noble and sublime; something that lifts me and the earth with me to the gates of paradise. Oh, father, you must think as I think and feel as I feel, and join with me in the quest for Beauty—the quest in which the whole world is engaged without being conscious of it. You know that. It's what you have been searching for in Covey all these

years. It's what I was searching for when I left you and left Norman. Can't you see, father? Can't you realize there was another power impelled me than myself? Can't you see I was driven by a law higher than our law?"

"You had Beauty offered to you and you rejected it," said my father coldly.

"Oh, father, can you still say that?" I cried in poignant grief.

"I still say it," he replied. "I still find you a prey to illusions as when you assumed to dictate to those who loved you and thought only of your happiness."

"Don't you see I am different, father?" I asked in distress. "Won't you ask me to come back; won't you accept my offer; won't you let me at least be a real daughter to you; won't you stand with me on an equal footing and strive for the Beauty of life; won't I learn from you and won't you learn from me?"

"I am afraid your head is filled with theories, Frizzie," he said impassively.

"Don't you comprehend, father, that if I ever go back it never, never can be the same as it was long ago?"

"I comprehend that fully," he said. "I comprehend it only too well."

"Then I can never go," I cried. "I won't ask you to help me carry my shield. I will go on the quest alone. I will go alone, father, and leave you behind again with all your conventions."

"I have not asked you what you have been doing," he said. "You have not asked about me or about Norman?"

"It is too late for that now," I replied. "I have crossed the bridge and the bridge is down, and we stand on opposite sides of the chasm."

"Be it so," said my father sternly; and the remembrance came to me of his intonation as he used to read the First

Lesson and the Second Lesson. He arose and walked with determined step toward the door. I caught a glimpse of Mrs. Hall coming down the stairs. Father saw her, and drew back into the room, totally oblivious of my presence.

Mrs. Hall came in very softly, and with a look of ineffable tenderness on her face. Her head was slightly turned from me, and I saw a rose red and soft against the gray and brown of her hair. She must have taken in the situation at a glance, for she said:

"Charles, you are not going to deny Frizzie, are you?"

"You have taken my daughter and saved her for me," exclaimed father. "You! You!"

"Yes, Charles, I have done that—if you think that Frizzie required saving."

"It's you—you, Alice, after all these years!"

I felt I was an intruder there. I tiptoed without a sound out of the room. I went half-way up the stairs and sank on a step, and thought of the face of the girl framed in gold. It seemed to me I was living in other days. I thought that while the world might grow old Romance would remain ever young and in bloom. I knew then that with me memory would become a sacred thing, and that wherever my footsteps led surely I had something richer and sweeter than material happiness.

I slipped back to the room at the low call of Mrs. Hall. Father was standing with his back to me, gazing up at the girl's portrait. Mrs. Hall guided me to his side, and I saw that all the harshness and austerity had gone from him.

"Alice Grey! Alice Grey!" said my father to himself, as if speaking across the years. "Alice! Alice!" he added, and turned to me. "Ah, Frizzie, I fear it is not for me to learn from you or for you to learn from me, but for both of us to learn from Mrs. Hall."

"Father, Mrs. Hall has taught me everything."

"So she has, Frizzie, even to filling your head with all those Beauty fancies, and beautiful fancies they are!"

"You think so, father? Oh, I am so happy!" I cried; and felt Mrs. Hall's arm go around me.

"We shall go back to Covey together, Frizzie."

"Only together, father?"

I glanced at Mrs. Hall and saw red suffuse her cheeks.

"Together, Frizzie," said father, but I guessed his emphasis was more assumed than real. "We shall go to Covey and we shall see if we cannot find that wonderful, wonderful thing you call Beauty. But we won't go far—for I have found it, Frizzie!"

"You have, father?" I cried, rejoicing.

"I have found it with the help of Mrs. Hall and you, my daughter. I had crushed Beauty out of my life. When the girl in the picture died; when another girl died—your mother, Frizzie—I forgot youth and youth's hope and youth's forgiveness and wrapt myself up in a cold religion. We shall go back together, Frizzie, and in our remembrances our hearts shall be as big as the world—as big as the universe. I will preach a new religion—the religion that where there is Beauty there also is heaven, and that heaven is in all of us if we will only see! That is your Beauty, Frizzie?"

"It is, father," I cried, "but—but the girl in the picture is not dead."

"She will never die," said my father gravely. A gleam of humor showed in his eyes. "But you must understand, Frizzie, she is dead to all save a very, very few. Isn't that so, Mrs. Hall?" he asked, raising his voice.

"Only three know she is alive," answered Mrs. Hall bravely, but with a tell-tale little sigh.

CHAPTER XXXVII

SO HERE we are, you and I, ready for the parting. I face it sadly. Not that I shrink from the rough breaking of ties, but because I fear you will go disappointed at the manner of girl I am. Well, I can only say, I cannot help it; I cannot help myself.

If it was weakness brought me back to Covey, I can't help that. If it was absurd, downright silliness, I can't help that. If all my thoughts of a world transformed into Beauty were vain and profitless and sheer nonsense, I can't help that. There are so few things we can help! What is it we are permitted to do of our own free will? I'm sure I don't know. Speaking only for myself, I must confess I'll never speak of independence again.

Oh, the independent girl I have been! You know—you know the way I've ebbcd and flowed in humanity's tide. I can't imagine how you find the world, but for myself—well, I shall only proclaim that hard as I tried I couldn't sail my ship single-handed. I couldn't put out from port without a crew, and whether I would or not the crew recruited itself, and trimmed my sails and took the rudder out of my hands and sailed my ship for me! What I've learned on my voyaging I hardly know. I thought I knew, but reflection only increases the wonder and perplexity of it all. What's life? My friend, my friend, what is it?

But I'm content. Yes, I'm content. I sing it out; I go to my knoll and send my shout, "I'm content!"

traveling to the ends of the earth, and the echo comes back to me swelled a thousandfold. It has gathered all this volume on the way, and I wonder why it has not fallen and spent itself out there and left me lonely as of old. Oh, when I go out there to my knoll now, I hear bells ringing joyously, and voices come and whisper sweetly in my ears!

It seems as if I only had slipped away for a day, and a day taught me, and I have returned to dream other dreams. Other dreams? Always, always, dreams! Six months have flown since father came to Mrs. Hall's, and at thought of father and Mrs. Hall I feel very, very insignificant. I feel chastened when I think of them; I feel sorry for the selfish vanity of my youth. What's been my experience? I haven't nursed a wounded heart for twenty years, but, here, here! rejoice with me. Rejoice with father and with Mrs. Hall, for one day soon—oh, I won't be a tattler!

I've not met Mrs. Clark; I've not met Norman yet. But I've met Mr. Clark—the dear old man, he almost cried over me. Mother Ann is as fussy as if the joy of the reunion will last forever. She comes and sits beside me and sews and hums while I pore over these pages in my room. My room? Not a thing changed; all the same as when I went away; and should you happen along some day, look up and you will see me in the window gazing far across the treetops upon the Atlantic.

I have not heard from Roy. Mr. Wesson still is silent. Mrs. Hall has not once spoken Roy's name. All that reaches me is an occasional letter from Winnie, and she irritates me. Why does she not mention Frank? She owes me that much. But there is no longer gloom in her letters, and that may mean something.

Here then I sit at my little mahogany desk and write

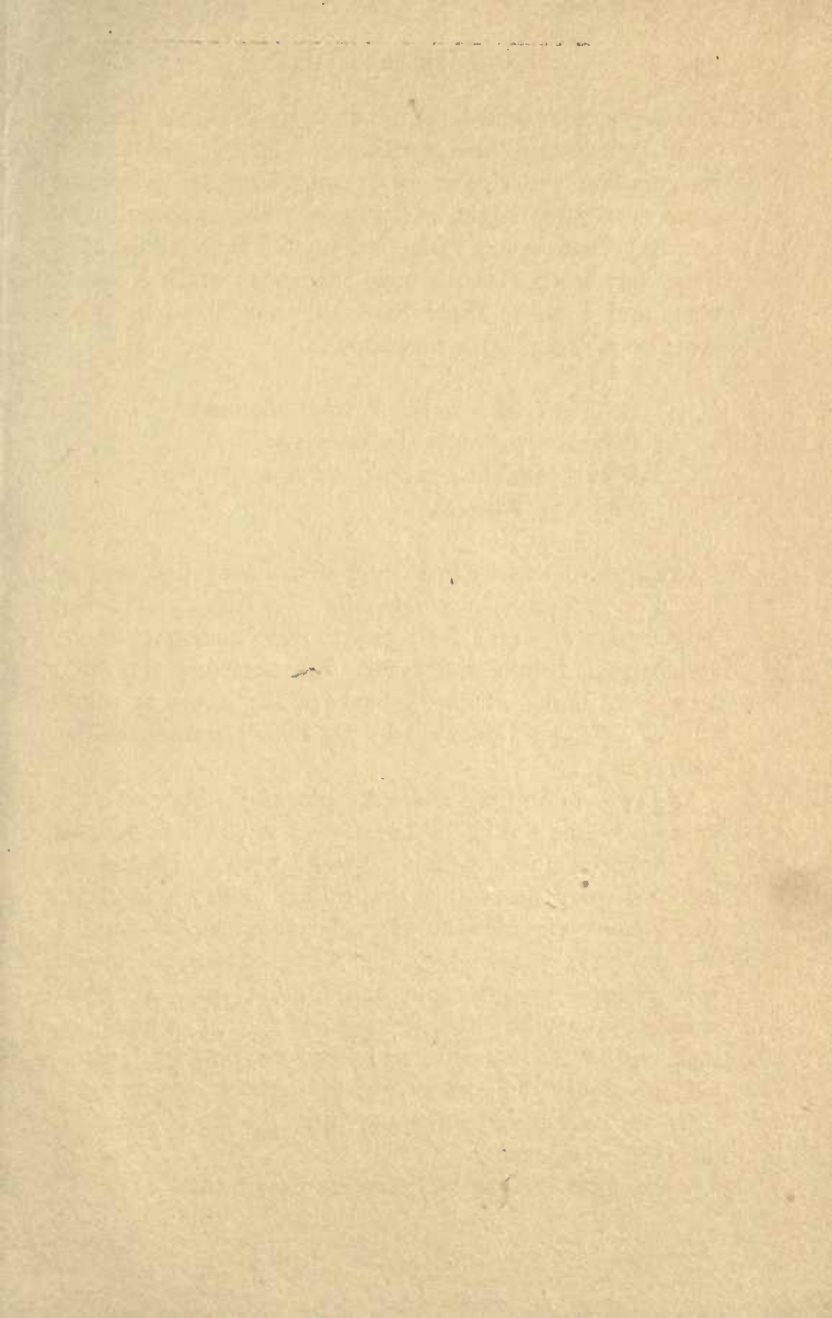
and write and write! Why do I do it? Let me see. Shall I make one more confession? That I will, because the mischief will rise in me. Long, long ago when the moon was out of sight and the night was dark and only one star shone out, I addressed myself to that lone star. That was when I was young enough to think I was a poet, and I wrote these lines and sent them to "Our Readers' Corner" in a magazine:

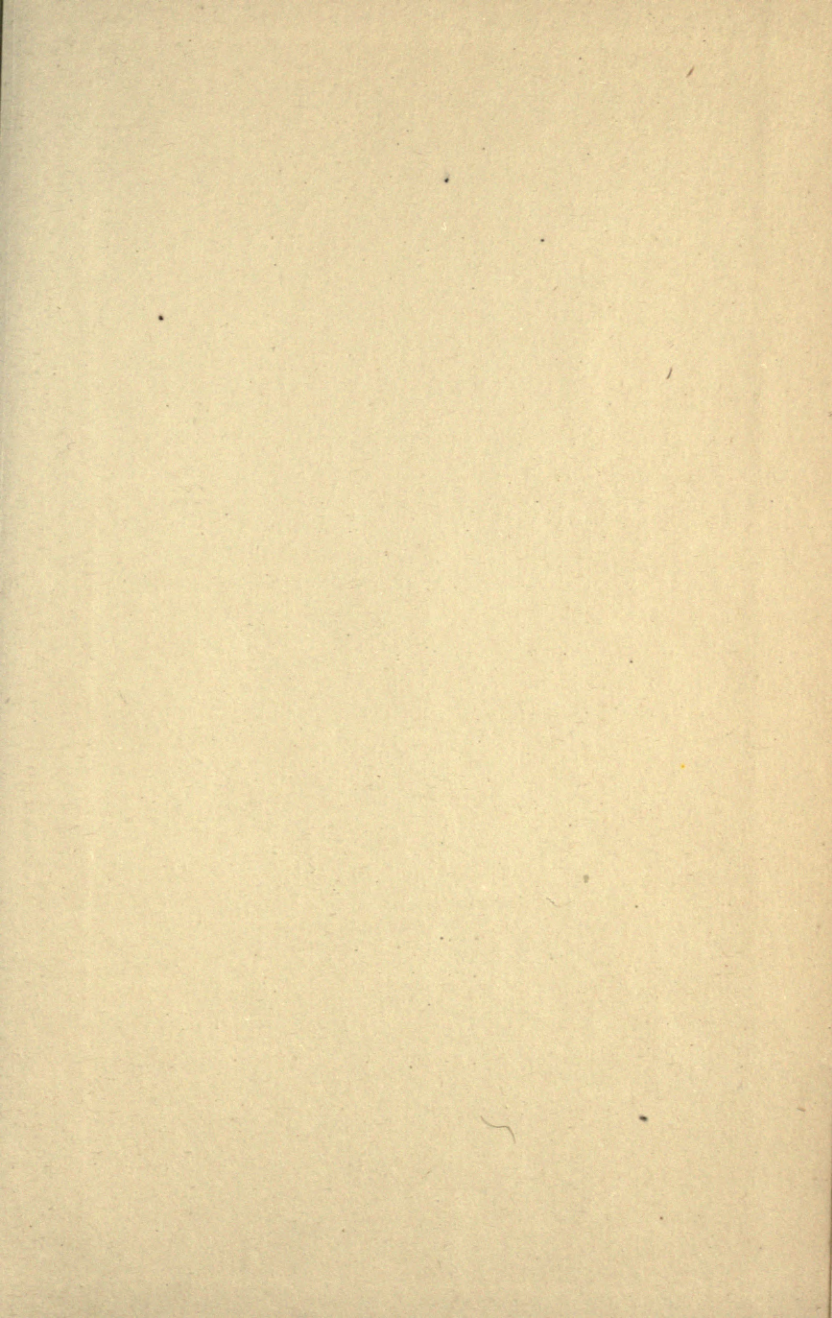
*O, Star! who knowest what thou art?
Who can on earth thy story read?
What matchless worth, what utter dross,
Thy light conceals?*

My reward was a gentle intimation I was mad, and all this I've written is my revenge. I'm mad still! But what matter? Here I sit at my little mahogany desk, and write and write and write! You remember my little mahogany desk? Didn't I make a slip about it somewhere? Oh, yes I did; but I'll not bother you any longer with trifles.

It's very quiet here and very peaceful. Should I get up and go into the hall I'd see father at his desk writing his sermon for next Sunday; should he look up and see me he'd greet me with a smile filled with tender love. But I won't disturb him. I prefer to sit and dream. I see the little globe which my fancy has placed on its wire pedestal on my table, and I dream on. My gaze wanders away, and the globe fades from my mind. I look out of the window, and what do I see? Dreaming, dreaming! Something rises between me and my view out over the tree-tops and upon the sea. Can it be the face of Norman?

Away with this pen! I'd rather dream than write.





UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 119 860 5

